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American Literature from Modernism to Postmodernism: Lectures for Master Students

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Contents

Introduction……………………………………………………………..…….……………………..………..4

Lecture One: Modernism in Verse…………………………………………………………..………..7

Lecture Two: Stevens' Biography and Poetic Theory ……………………………….....…………..16

Lecture Three: Wallace Stevens and the Americanization and Secularization of Classical Mythology………………………………………………………………………………………25

Lecture Four: Stevens' Poetry as a Secular Response to Dante's *The Divine Comedy…………….....32*

Lecture Five: Analogy and Allusion against the Subjectivity of Romanticism………………...……..40

Lecture Six: Stevens' Perspectivism and Multiple Truths………………………………...……..47

Lecture Seven: Stevens and the Contemporaries: French Symbolism and Imagism………………….52

Lecture Eight: Stevens and Cubism: Collage and Perspectivism……………………………….….59

Lecture Nine: One: Introductory Element to William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*…………………….62

Lecture Ten: The Presence of Religion in *As I Lay Dying*……………………………………………74

Lecture Eleven: Albert Camus' Idea of Endurance in *The Myth of Sisyphus* in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*……………………………………………………………………….…………77

Lecture Twelve: Stylistic Devices in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*………………..………….83

Lecture Thirteen: The Seven Bundren Narrators and Perspectivism *in As I Lay Dying* ………..…….89

Lecture Fourteen: Nonfamily Narrators and Perspectivism *in As I Lay Dying*………………………..98

Lecture Fifteen: Rural Modernism and Modernity *in As I Lay Dying* ………..……………….…….105

Lecture Sixteen: Addie Bundren the Disobedient Mother *in As I Lay Dying*………………….. 111

Lecture Seventeen: Postmodernism and its Tenets………………………………………… 118

Lecture Eighteen: Robert Lowell's Postmodern Confessional Poetry………………………123

Lecture Nineteen: Lowell's Confessional Poetry as a Christian Impersonal Personal

Aesthetics……………………………………..…………………………… 126

Lecture Twenty: Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*: Background……………………..130

Lecture Twenty-one: Postmodern Tenets in Kurt *Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five*……....137

Lecture Twenty-two: Kurt *Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse*-Five as a Mock-Heroic Novel…….142

Lecture Twenty-Three: Devaluation of Traditional Epic Subjects of Nationhood, Love and

Heroism……………………………………………………………………..146

Bibliography……………………………………………………………...……..150

Introduction

This handout is a teaching document of Twenty-three lectures entitled "America Literature from Modernism to Postmodernism." Modernism was a movement in the arts that lasted from the late 19th century to the middle of the 20th century. Postmodernism is a late 20th-century movement in philosophy and literary theory that generally questions the basic assumptions of Western philosophy in the modern period . The lectures undertake a detailed study of two Modernist writings, Wallace Stevens' poetry and William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* .To understand the different aspects of Postmodernism the lectures will focus on Robert Lowell's poetry and Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Slaughterhouse Five.*

The Modernists strove to find new ways of writing to produce a work of art that reflected in style and form the instability of modern existence. The political, economic, social, and cultural changes favoured the modernist departure from Romanticism. In fact, the urbanization, the horror of the war, and the loss of spirituality increased the modernist sense of alienation from reality and engendered awareness that the Romantic escapist approach to reality is no longer adequate to reflect these changing circumstances. They resisted the Romantic use of nature as a setting, or even a subject. Instead, they wanted to continually confront aspects of the modern world by creating a poetry that would focus on immediate urban conditions. In addition, the radical new social theories, elaborated Darwin, Marx, and Freud revealed the self as a pawn in a process dominated by an inaccessible unconscious play of forces and prompted the Modernist to challenge the Romantic solipsism and to find new methods to get rid of it.

Postmodernism follows most of the modernist ideas, rejecting boundaries between high and low forms of art, rejecting rigid genre distinctions, fragmentation and discontinuity, and intertextuality. But postmodernism differs from modernism in its attitude toward a lot of these

trends. Modernism tends to present a fragmented view of history as something tragic and works of art can provide the unity, coherence, and meaning which have been lost in most of modern life. Postmodernism, in contrast, does not lament the idea of fragmentation, provisionally, or incoherence, but rather celebrates that.

The first discussed writer in these lectures is the Modernist poet Wallace Stevens whose poetic concerns in theory and in practice are to cure poetry from Romantic subjectivity and escapism to nature. He also offered poetry without the metaphysical additions as a substitute for Christianity and Classical mythology. To achieve this aim, Stevens crafted a poetic theory based on adherence to reality, abstractness, change and pleasure.To create impersonal poetry, Stevens turned to the 17th century Metaphysical poet John Donne who objectified poetry through the use of a device called the conceit. Stevens' technique of resemblances, which is an equivalent to Donne's conceit, is adopted to achieve the extinction of personality. Stevens also manipulates and transforms tenets Imagism and Cubism to guard his poetry against romantic Romanticism.

In addition, Urbanization of poetry became one of the two principal concerns of the Stevens. The other was to suggest art as a necessary replacement for religion a cultural regeneration. Against the romantic idealization and idolization of nature, Stevens turned to the French Symbolist Baudelaire to find a way incorporate the sordid aspects of the modern metropolis into their works. They present nature as a setting that epitomizes the consequences of urbanization rather than a symbol of beauty and harmony. To fill the spiritual vacuum in modern societies turned to Classical mythology and Dante's. Rejecting the metaphysical and theological assumptions of the Classical and medieval texts, Stevens offers secularized poetry based on physical world.

The Second studied Modernist American author in these lectures is William Faulkner whose *As I Lay Dying* illustrates the characteristic form and content of the modernist

novel. The main concern of the novel is the ethical and moral decline of the South after the Civil War. The novel also presents brilliant insight into the psychological, economic, and social realities of life in the South in the transition from the Civil War to the modern era through Bundren family. To support these thematic concerns, Faulkner experiments with a wide range of mythical and biblical images, fragmentism and perspectivism .

The postmodern poet dealt with in these lectures is Robert Lowell Lowell who pioneered a new style in American poetry called "confessional." Despite the influence of Eliot on Lowell, confessional poetry differs in many ways from Eliot's modernism.

Many of Lowell's poems share Eliot's idea that in this violent world Christian redemption is the only hope. Lowell like Eliot urbanizes poetry by incorporating chaos, ugliness, imperfection, and fragmentation of the city. However, Lowell's use of the autobiographical self and memory was a departure from the Eliotic aesthetics that poetry is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality. Confessional poetry is more political committed that Eliot's modernism as uses his personal experiences to address political issues.

The last discussed author in these lectures is the postmodern novelist Kurt Vonnegut. His novel *Slaughterhouse Five contains the main tenets of postmodernism. These tenets include m* Metafiction, Intertextuality, Fragmentarism and multiple endings. They are employed to reinforce the Roland Barthes' principle of the death of the author and to place the power of interpretation into the hands of the reader to attack grand-narratives that glorify the war. Inthe novel, the traditional epic conventions such as invocating the muse, descriptions from bloody battles and underworld, or even the hero's journey and his weapons which are used to glorify nations, battles and heroes are manipulated to express his dissatisfaction with his country's policy during times of national and international conflicts.

Lecture One: Modernism in Verse

1. Introduction

One achievement of Romanticism, a movement that preceded Modernism, was its awareness of the disunity between man and his world which Eliot calls the "dissociation of sensibility." Rather than striving for reconciliation, the Romantics attempted to create an ideal world through art that focused on the self and offered a purely imagined nature as a refuge against the real world from which they felt alienated. A group of poets led by Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle that Frank Kermode calls the "Paleo-modernists" formulated a poetic approach that relied on Classical European tradition to veer away from Romantic art that celebrated the individual as the source of great art. Another group of poets that Kermode calls "Neo-modernists»headed by William Carlos Williams and Hart Crane appealed for a literature that focused on the immediate experience of America.

2. Tenets of Romanticism

One achievement of Romanticism, a movement that preceded Modernism, was its awareness of the disunity between man and his world which Eliot calls the "dissociation of sensibility." Rather than striving for reconciliation, the Romantics attempted to create an ideal world through art that focused on the self and offered a purely imagined nature as a refuge against the real world from which they felt alienated.

Despite their differences, the Romantics shared a certain number of common tenets. One of them is an emphasis on the poetic creation based on feeling and imagination. William Wordsworth, an outstanding Romantic poet, says in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" that "all poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings."[1] For Wordsworth, emotion is the

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1. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 98.

fundamental condition of poetry. Without emotion and powerful feelings, poetry cannot be written. To better understand the assumptions of Romanticism, it is relevant to consider William Wordsworth's poem "I Wandered Lonely as A Cloud," a poem that embodies all the Romantic tenets:

> I wandered lonely as a cloud
> That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
> When all at once I saw a crowd,
> A host, of golden daffodils;
> Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
> Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
> Continuous as the stars that shine
> And twinkle on the milky way,
> They stretched in never-ending line
> Along the margin of a bay:
> Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
> Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.
>
> The waves beside them danced; but they
> Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
> A poet could not but be gay,
> In such a jocund company:
> I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
> What wealth the show to me had brought:
>
> For oft, when on my couch I lie

In vacant or in pensive mood,

They flash upon that inward eye

Which is the bliss of solitude;

And then my heart with pleasure fills,

And dances with the daffodils. [2]

The first is the Romantic belief in poetry as a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings and emotions. The first part of the poem describes the speaker's loneliness using such words as "vacant," "pensive" and "solitude." However, being isolated from the community is a way of cultivating his emotion through a deep communion with nature. In the second part of the poem, the words "glee," "gay" and "bliss" show the speaker's joy while he is alone with nature. The other important Romantic tenet is the idolization of nature. In Wordsworth's poem, the speaker has a real affinity with nature which is shown in the way he describes the scene and his emotions toward it. After describing the daffodils, the poem shifts to concentrate on the mind of the speaker: "A poet could not but be gay, / In such a jocund company." Later, while alone in his room, the memory of the daffodils revives and fulfils the psychological vacancy of his self, and now his heart "dances with the daffodils."

The third Romantic tenet epitomized in the poem is the idea of individuality. The repetition of the first person pronoun which is even the first word of the poem "I wandered" makes of the poem an account of the speaker's individual experience of nature. Individuality is further supported by that fact that the speaker is wandering lonely and thus detached from the rest of society.

3. The Romantic Failure to Cope with 20th Century Changes

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2. William Wordsworth, *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, in: 1801-1805* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2008), 202.

However, with the early 20th century changes, Romanticism became the subject to attack. The two main reasons for this attack were solipsism and escapism. The Romantics, though living in the middle of the urban chaos, could not create art in the condition of the present. They remained devoted to nature and ignored the city where they lived. This return to nature is a form of escapism from the harsh realities of the cities that resulted from the Industrial Revolution.

The second reason was solipsism. In fact, the Romantic solipsism is the result of the adoption of Rousseau's principle that man is by nature good, that is, the belief that what is special in a man is to be valued over the conventions of society. This idea led to a belief that the self is the only certain part of reality, and reality is only a product of the self's awareness. Wordsworth's daffodils are only the product of the poet's self's awareness. From here, it is obvious that "the poet does not merely describe objects of nature, but projects his own subjective state onto natural objects and then describes not the object itself but his own state."[3]

The political economic social and cultural changes favoured the modernist departure from romanticism. In fact, the urbanization, the horror of the war, and the loss of spirituality increased the modernist sense of alienation from reality and engendered awareness that the romantic escapist approach to reality is no longer adequate to reflect these changing circumstances. In addition the radical new social theories elaborated by Marx, Darwin and Freud questioned man's secure place man at the centre of the universe and revealed his unwitty dependence on laws and structures outside his control and even sometimes beyond his knowledge. These theories, prompted the modernist to challenge the romantic solipsism and find new methods to get rid of it.

3. D. J. Moores, *Mysticald Discourse in Wordsworth and Whitman* (Leuven: Peeter, 2006), 58.

For the modernists, it is necessary to find new aesthetics that would cope with these changing circumstances. In this context Burt Kimmelman, argues that for the modernist, "this new world could only be adequately reflected in the most innovative modes of expression." From here, Pound's maxim 'make it new' became the "most frequent quotation from the period." [4] However, what this maxim came to mean was varied from writer to writer. One of the subjects of dispute among the modernists was the place of tradition. Relying on the modernist contending attitudes toward tradition, Frank Kermode divides modernism into paleo-modernism and neo-modernism.

4. Paleo-modernism: The Tradition of Return

The paleo-modernist aim was to culminate the revival of antiquity and the way to cultural health is a strenuous process of return to classical culture. Eliot and Pound, the best American representatives of paleo-modernism, resorted to elements from classical traditions to juxtapose the stable cultures of the past with the superficiality of modern culture. The Paleo-modern claimed that Modernism as a way to cultural health implied a strenuous process of return to Classical culture and to antiquity.

The precursor of Paleo-modernism was the German Classicist scholar Frederick Nietzsche, who used the ancient world to draw some lessons for the modern one. For Nietzsche, modernity lacks direction because it ignores the past. Building a new future depends on the ability to see the continuity with the strengths of the past. His aim is to direct society towards the proper usage of history, which would fulfil its function of serving life: "Historical education is wholesome and promising for the future only in the service of a powerful new life-giving influence." [5] In addition, by emphasizing the view that history is not an end in itself, but rather a means to serving life, Nietzsche underlines how history can be

4. Rebecca Beasley, *Theorists of Modernist Poetry: T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme, Ezra Pound* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 19.
5. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life,* trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub, 1980), 14.

used as a tool for modernity. Many American Modernist writers, among them T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle answered Nietzsche's call for the return to the past, particularly the literary past. Pound resorted to elements from Classical traditions to juxtapose the stable cultures of the past with the superficiality of modern culture, as the following passage from section three of Pound's cantos reveals:

> The tea-rose tea-gown etc.
>
> Supplants the mousseline of Cos,
>
> The pianola "replaces"
>
> Sappho's barbitos.[6]

The use of quotation marks on "replaces" shows that the new forms of culture cannot "replace" the old ones; they only fulfill a factitious function. The "tea-rose," the "tea-gown," and the "pianola" represent the debased versions of authentic art. On the other hand, the "mousseline," produced on the Greek island of Cos, and the "barbitos,"or lyre, of the ancient Greek poet Sappho are the genuine work of art. While tea-gown is artificial, the simple muslin cloth of the Classical era was pure. Unlike the pianola, which plays from a roll of perforated paper without any contact with the musician, the "barbitos" represents the unity of the human voice and music.

In H.D reveals her optimism that the civilisation can counteract the violence of the war through the healing power of writing. Addressing the sword, she reminds it that its " Triumph, however exultant, / must one day be over, / in the beginning / was the Word." [7] In the following passage, H.D refers to mythological figures credited with inventing writing in order to suggest how writing may transcend death. These figures include the Egyptian Thoth, the Greek Hermes, and the Roman Mercury:

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6. Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1957), 8.
7. Hilda Doolittle, *Trilogy* (New York: New Directions, 1998), 10.

beyond death; Mercury, Hermes, Thoth

invented the script, letters, palette;

the indicated flute or lyre-notes

on papyrus or parchment

are magic, indelibly stamped

on the atmosphere somewhere,

forever; remember. [8]

The reference to figures belonging to different eras and cultures implies that words are immortal, and "we take them with us / beyond death." [9] Despite the devastation caused by the weapons of war, writing and civilisation will survive.

5. Neomodernism

Many other American poets, among them Wallace Stevens, Hart Crane, and William Carlos Williams sought to disassociate their work from the appeal to tradition. They were the poets that Kermode calls the Neo-modernists. For them, relying on tradition means commitment to what is distant and abstract from the contemporary American conditions. These poets found inspiration in the writings of Walt Whitman who was the fathers of the authentic American poetry because of his attempt to produce works that would distinguish American literature from the literary tradition of Europe. Whitman directly focuses on the fundamental issues related to the United States. Whitman was the first truly American poet. Whitman the anti-traditional stance which rejected the tradition of self-consciously literary writing associated with English poetry. He was the poet who spoke in an American voice due to the details of the American experience he included in his poetry

A poem by William Carlos Williams, "The Red Wheelbarrow" is presented as the neomodernist response to the paleomodernism of T.S. Eliot and others:

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid

so much depends

upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain

water

beside the white

chickens.[10]

This farmyard poem is highly ideological. It is an assault on Eliot's defence of classical cultures.The poem is directed to the paleomodernist arguing that this poem by virtue of its simplicity and homeliness is poem.

Crane focuses on the present and recognizes the role of capitalism in shaping a cultural confusion as part of the immediate conditions and ways of life in America in the opening lines from "The Bridge." He shows a cultural confusion as a surplus of names and naming driven by consumerism:

Stick your patent name on a signboard

brother -- all over -- going west -- young man

Tintex -- Japalac -- Certain-teed Overalls ads

and lands sakes! [11]

The confusion initiated by names related to trade and manufacture such as a dye "Tintex" (dye), Japalac (a varnish) ", and "teed Overalls" (a brand of overalls) is deepened by technology, with its "telegraphic night coming on" and its "fast express rushing by." The inclusion of such elements shows Crane's commitment to portraying his contemporary

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10. William Carlos Williams, *The Collected Poems of William* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1986), 224.
11. Hart Crane, *The Complete Poems and Selected Letters and Prose of Hart Crane*, ed. Brom Weber (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 62.

cultural conditions but with crucial awareness of the potential confusion inherent in these conditions. This confusion represents another challenge that “The Bridge”must face to affirm relevance to its era.

Williams and crane asserted that American poetry must stem from its locality and must break from European tradition, often employed figures from Classical mythology. In his poem “At the Faucet of June”Williams makes a reference to classical figure of Persephone. Likewise, crane begins the final section of The *Bridge* entitled “Atlantis,” with an epigraph taken from Plato. This section is fraught with allusions to Tyre and Troy, Jason and Aeolus, and other symbols drawn from the European tradition. Thus, Williams’ and crane’s poetics which focuses on the American space does not prevent them from blending ancient Classical European myths with contemporary American references.

6. Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is important to retain that though the Modernists shared the similar goal of facing the Romantic self-expression and escapism to capture the changes that occurred in the twentieth century, they did not agree on how to attain this goal. From here, Modernism can be divided into two conflicting groups. The first group led by Pound and Doolittle relied on the established European literary tradition to validate their work. The other group led by Williams and Crane attempted to explore the uniquely American cultural circumstances of the era without resort to the European tradition.

Lecture Two: Stevens' Biography and Poetic Theory

1. Introduction

This lecture discusses how Wallace Stevens strove to make up for the lost belief in the faded ancient mythologies and Christianity by opening the gates to an Eden of poetry and inviting the readers to join him. This Eden of poetry is Stevens's "supreme fiction". The "supreme fiction" is an attempt to discover through its proper words a substitute for the worn-out Christianity and the long-dead old mythologies. In this context, Stevens says: "In an age in which disbelief is so profoundly prevalent or, if not disbelief, indifference to the question of belief, poetry and painting, and the arts in general, are a compensation for what has been lost" (WSCPP, 748). Stevens's obsession is to rescue humanity from confusion, disorder ugliness of reality and to make of the same reality the "supreme fiction" in which imagination brings meaning to man's existence. However, this could happen when human intelligence denies appeal to the supernatural. This is an unalienable condition to make the human existence not only endurable, but also credible. The "supreme fiction" as offered by Stevens does not revive or revise the old myths but attempts to replace them. It is based on a secular conception of man instead of a divine or metaphysical one. Thus the human imagination is "the value of a way of thinking by which we project the idea of God into the idea of man."[12] The "Supreme Fiction" to be credible must fulfil three conditions: abstractness, change and pleasure.

2. The Biography of Wallace Stevens

Stevens was born on October 2, 1879, in Reading. Stevens' parents were of Dutch and German ancestry.[13] Stevens "accepted his [American] origins in a way few American

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12. Morton Dauwen Zabel," Wallace Stevens and the Image of the Man," in *Wallace Stevens,* ed. Mary Borroff (New York: Prentice Hall INC, 1962), 157.
13. Thomas F. Lombardi, *Wallace Stevens and the Pennsylvania Keystone: The Influence of Origins on his Life and Poetry* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1996), 39.

writer ever accept them." [14] Except for a couple short-term trips to Cuba, Stevens never left the United States.[15] Stevens received classical education in Greek and Latin. He was educated in classics (including both Latin and Greek) at Reading Boys' High School from 1893 to 1897 and at Harvard from 1897 to1900.[16] Concerning religion, he came from protestant families but could not maintain his faith in Protestantism in the face of the late ninetieth and early twentieth religious scepticism. Stevens was raised in a Christian family. His mother "sent [him] to parochial elementary schools and to Sunday-school classes; sang hymns with the family as she accompanied herself on the piano on Sunday evenings, and read Bible stories to [him] at bedtime. Stevens in adolescence participated in the sacred service as an altar boy and, moving toward manhood, sang hymns himself, . . . for two years in the choir of Reading's Christ Cathedral." [17] Yet at Harvard, he gave up his orthodoxy and recognised that art was the most suitable candidate substitute for Christianity. In terms of profession, he was successful executives in the respectable business. He had a successful professional career outside poetry. After leaving Harvard in 1900, "Stevens first tried his hand briefly at journalism, working as a reporter for the New York Tribune."[18] In 1909, on his father's advice, he entered the New York Law School.[19] In 1904, he "passed his bar examinations and was admitted to practice."[20] However, he failed in his law practice and joined the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company in 1916.[21] He had also been appointed vice president of the Hartford Insurance Company in 1934.[22]

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14. Ibid., 21.
15. Fabio Akcelrud Durão, *Modernism and Coherence* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 65.
16. Joan Richardson, "Wallace Stevens: A Likeness," *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens*, ed. John N. Serio (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 10.
17. Ibid., 10.
18. Lisa Goldfarb and Bart Eeckhout, *Wallace Stevens, New York, and Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 7.
19. Ibid., 57.
20. Lombardi, W*allace Stevens and the Pennsylvania Keystone*, 53.
21. Goldfarb and Eeckhou, *Wallace Stevens*, *New York, and Modernism*, 24.
22. Richardson, "Wallace Stevens: A Likeness," 19.

3. Abstractness

Stevens finds neither consolation nor enlightenment in conventional mythologies, religious traditions, or cultural histories. Thus the mind which is a point of creative power must become a blank mind free of preconceptions to match up perfectly with reality. This abstraction is an attempt to see the world again with an innocent eye.

In the first section of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" entitled "It Must Be Abstract," the speaker exhorts the ephebe, a student of poetry, to become ignorant and to see the world in an ignorant eye:

> Begin, ephebe, by perceiving the idea
>
> Of this invention, this invented world,
>
> The inconceivable idea of the sun.
>
> You must become an ignorant man again
>
> And see the sun again with an ignorant eye
>
> And see it clearly in the idea of it.(329)

This stripping of characteristics and this expelling of images at seeing is "the first idea" which according to Stevens sets reality free from the dead formulae that obscure it. "The first idea" is therefore a state completely devoid of any preconceived conception of reality. In an attempt to explain what he means by the "first idea," Stevens says: "If you take the varnish and dirt of generations off a picture, you see it in its first idea. If you think about the world without its varnish and dirt, you are a thinker of the first idea" (LWS, 427).

4. Change

Stevens's idea of change means the power of the imagination to constantly create a new poetry. The world of which the poet is a part is in a state of constant change; as a result, the "supreme fiction" must constantly change to fit with this changing world. The necessity of the cycle of change is reaffirmed in the tenth canto:

The freshness of transformation is

The freshness of a world. It is our own,

It is ourselves, the freshness of ourselves,

And that necessity and that presentation

Are rubbings of a glass in which we peer. (WSCPP, 344)

All that does not change becomes obsolete. The Statue of General Du Puy is an illustration of a noble rider who does not change, and becomes rubbish in the end:

……………………………the General,

The very Place Du Puy, in fact, belonged

Among our more vestigial states of mind.

Nothing had happened because nothing had changed.

Yet the General was rubbish in the end. (WSCPP, 338)

The statue represents for Stevens the stagnant ideal left behind by dynamic history. The idea of nobility it embodies is no longer appropriate to the changed conditions for nobility in a new historical situation. As a symbol for belief, it has failed to resist the pressure of new reality and has become consequently incredible. In The statue represents for Stevens the stagnant ideal left behind by dynamic history. The idea of nobility it embodies is no longer appropriate to the changed conditions for nobility in a new historical situation. As a symbol for belief, it has failed to resist the pressure of new reality and has become consequently incredible. In this respect, Stevens writes in *The Necessary Angel*: "It seems, nowadays, what it may very well not have seemed a few years ago, a little overpowering, a little magnificent" (WSCPP, 647).

From here we can say that constant change in poetry is necessary because reality changes. Stevens believes that no faith is absolute, beliefs are credible for particular periods. As such the fiction is final for a moment in the sense that poetic truth is final since it brings

about agreement with reality believed to be true for a time, that is, until a constant change of reality calls for a new imaginative adjustment. Thus, in a world whose main aspect is change, poetry is a progressive metamorphosis of reality, and reality itself is an entity whose chief characteristic is flux. Thus, man

> Lives in a fluid not on solid rock.
>
> The solid was an age, a period
>
> With appropriate ………….. (WSCPP, 168)

Stevens wrote in a period in which the beliefs that once ordered reality have become unreliable, yet he is concerned with discovering beliefs that are credible in America present. In this context, Bonnie Costello points out that "our 'supreme fictions,' our metaphysical inventions, learn their changes less from autonomous compositional laws than from physical surroundings" [23]

5. Pleasure

It is the irrational moment or the "unreasoning" which gives delight by interweaving imagination with reality. The pleasure "the supreme fiction" exalts is neither the obsolete joy of heaven nor "the gaunt world of reason". In "The Apostrophe to Vincentine," the imagination gives the static object not only life but also emotion and the ability to transform reality. The poem begins with the poets imagining Vincentine as small, nude nameless creature between single-colored earth and dark blue sky:

> I figure you as nude between
>
> Monotonous earth and dark blue sky.
>
> It made you seem you small and lean
>
> And nameless
>
> Heavenly Vincentine

---

23. Costello, Bonnie, *Shifting Ground: Reinventing Landscape in Modern American Poetry*, (London: Harvard University Press, 2009), 69.

Through the speaker's imagination, the sculpture, Vincentine, becomes more life-like, progressively gaining a name, warmth, clean girl in a whited green dress:

I saw you then, as warm as flesh,

Brunette,

But yet not to brunette,

As warm, as clean

Your dress was green,

Was white green

Green Vincentine

In the third Stanza, she is allowed to walk and speak. She is also placed in a society or group of human others so that her voice can be heard:

In a group

Of human other

Voluble.

Yes: you came walking,

Vincentine

Yes: you came talking. (WSCPP, 42)

When she approaches, talking, he adds her emotion to his conception of her color, movement, a voice, and feelings: "And what I knew you felt / Came then." (WSCPP, 42)

Then Vincentine changes from a tiny animal to a living woman. She becomes the heavenly or platonic axis on which all creation turn. The monotonous earth metamorphoses into spheres without limits, and Vincentine has turned from the lean white animal to the opposite of animality- to "heavenly Vincentine":

Monotonous earth I saw become

Illimitable spheres of you,

And white animal, so lean,

Turned Vincentine

Turned heavenly Vincentine

And that white animal, so lean,

Turned heavenly, heavenly Vincentine. (WSCPP, 42)

Stevens has chosen his heroine's names for reasons of sense as well as of sound. The name Vincentine which means conquering signifies the victory of consciousness over inanimate being.

6. Adherence to reality

In addition to abstractness, change and pleasure, Stevens's "supreme fiction" must adhere to reality. By reality Stevens means absolute fact or the things as they are. The central view of the "supreme fiction" is that if it is not quite reality, at least it grows out of reality. He qualifies his description of absolute fact as destitute of any imaginative aspect. In this context Stevens argues that "the more destitute it [reality] becomes the more it begins to be precious" (WSCPP, 681). Reality beyond the imagination is the data with which the imagination works.

Thus, the imagination has no source except from reality. "The Ordinary Woman" emphasizes that imagination symbolized by "the guitars" springs from reality or, as Stevens calls it, "poverty":

Then from poverty they rose,

From dry catarrhs, and the guitars

They flitted

Through the palace wall.

Reality is thus the starting point for any activity of the mind. Stevens says: “The real is only the base. But it is the base” (WSCPP, 917).   This is why “the imagination loses its vitality as its ceases to adhere to what is real” (WSCPP, 645).

The seventh section of “The Man with the Blue Guitar” affirms that human activities have to do with the sun, or reality. Otherwise “the moon, or the imagination, is meaningless to the working world of reality. A work without reality is meaningless. Accordingly man behaves like “mechanical beetles” caught in routine and deprived of imagination; as a result, they are “never quite warm”:

> It is the sun that shares our work.
>
> The moon shares nothing. It is a sea.
>
> When shall I come to say of the sun,
>
> It is a sea, it shares nothing;
>
> The sun no longer shares our works
>
> And the earth is alive with creeping men,
>
> Mechanical beetles never quite warm? (WSCPP, 137)

The imagination therefore is not as a “merciful good” which reduces the pressure of reality:

> And shall then stand in the sun, as now
>
> I stand in the moon, and call it good,
>
> The immaculate, the merciful good,
>
> Detached from us, from thing as they as are
>
> Not to be part of the sun? (WSCPP, 138).

Withdrawn from reality, the imagination is cold, and the guitar-player cannot approve of it:

> To stand

Remote an call it merciful?

The strings are cold on the blue guitar. (WSCPP, 138)

7. Conclusion

For Stevens, poetry is the interplay between reality and the imagination; it is the power of the poet's imagination to transform this reality. To attain this transformation, according to Stevens, poetry should fulfil three conditions: abstraction, change and pleasure which the titles of the three sections of his long poem "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" suggest: "It Must Be Abstract," "It Must Change," and "It Must Give Pleasure." Thus, the mind, which is a point of creative power, must become a blank mind free of preconceptions to match up perfectly with reality

Lecture Three: Wallace Stevens and the Americanization and Secularization of Classical Mythology

1. Introduction

This chapter examines how Stevens uses myth to question its authenticity and authority. On the other hand, the handling of myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha further belies Stevens' claim that his poetry is a tabula rasa. His tendency to rewrite myths is further evidence of his need for the European past, namely classical mythology in order to forge a new American mythology. In "Comedian as the Letter C," the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha is an indispensable framework for defining American culture and refuting the European tradition.

2. The Story of Deucalion and Pyrrha.

In the Iron Age, the gods appeared and witnessed human impiety. In particular, Jupiter visited the house of the Lycaon, who treated Jupiter with the greatest disrespect, even trying to murder him in his sleep. Jupiter decided to punish humanity with a flood. Because of their piety, Deucalion and Pyrrha were saved from this deluge by building a chest. Then Neptune ordered Triton to blow on his shell and sound a retreat to the waters. Deucalion and Pyrrha found refuge in a temple. Inquiring how to renew the human race, they were ordered to cast behind them the bones of their mother. The couple correctly understood that "the mother" to be the earth Gaia, and threw stones. Those thrown by Deucalion became men and those thrown by Pyrrha became women. They later became the parents of Hellen, the eponymous ancestor of the Greeks.

3. Stevens and Classical Myth

Many reasons may explain Stevens' attitude against Classical mythology. As a secular poet, he attempts to live locally in "a world without heaven" (WSCPP, 104) and to develop an earthly poetics reflecting a desire to create a balance between the imagination and reality.

While Greek and Latin myths involve gods and therefore rest mainly on supernatural foundations, the imagination of Stevens has as its foundation the physical reality. The second reason has to do with Stevens' defence of the present and his scepticism about the past. His poetry tries to find what is fresh and attractive in the present divorced from traditional beliefs which he views as "a noble falsification of the present based on the assumption of the past."[24] A third reason is the purpose of his poetry which is to establish a background for American literature away from the Old World. Thus, Stevens' poetry that springs from what Joseph N. Riddel calls "American roots" [25] relates him to a trend in American culture that redefines American identity against the European culture structure.

4. Departure: From Religious to Secular Motives

At first sight, Crispin has little in common with the mythic heroes, such as Deucalion and Pyrrha, who are close to the gods; his quest is very different from the traditional quest pattern in terms of motives, initiation and return. Though in both stories, impiety constitutes the motive for the journey, the meaning and nature of this sin is very different. Whereas in the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha, the pride and the disrespect with which Lycaon treats Jupiter causes the flood, the motive for Crispin's journey is secular as the object of impiety is the physical environment not the gods. Crispin treats the earth with great disrespect when he believes, for a while at least, that he has the imaginative power to control his environment. His opening motto "man is the intelligence of his soil" (WSCPP, 22) suggests that reality is subject to man's intelligence. Man discovers its nature by discerning and formulating its laws and making it intelligible. Man is the "sovereign ghost" (WSCPP, 22) because with his intelligence he controls his environment.

5. Initiation: Secularising the Quest for Americanness

24. Sukenick, *Musing the Obscure: Readings and Interpretation*, 2.
25. Joseph N. Riddel, quoted in Marie Borroff, *Wallace*, 30.

However, before Crispin comes to accept that "his soil is man’s intelligence" (WSCPP, 29) which makes him closer to the American reality, he has first to cleanse himself from the obsolete remnants of the European culture.

To achieve change, the hero experiences many trials and temptations. The first trial Crispin faces is the flood which is reminiscent of the flood loosed by Zeus as a force to purify the earth from sin in the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha. However, Crispin’s experience is secular, that is to say, with no godly source. The flood serves to put Crispin in a situation where he finds himself questioning his self-confidence and reducing his pride to the physical world. At home, Crispin is accustomed to homely objects that he can control and order. Now he is perplexed in the middle of the deep sea voyage. The sea that he cannot fathom is the place where his personality and his "mythology of self" (WSCPP, 22) dissolve. Because he cannot understand the meaning of this new reality, its music no longer reflects the direction of his intelligence.

After facing the baptism of the sea, Crispin, like Deucalion and Pyrrha has to embark on a new adventure to confront the new world in which he finds himself. As in the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha, Crispin has to accept his reality to fufill his quest. However, to accept reality is not an easy task because the protagonists in both stories have to face temptations. In the story of Deucalion and Pyrrha temptation comes from the temple where they fail to find a way of restoring mankind to the earth. Yet the solution lies in the earth and the protagonists have to solve the riddle of casting stones to re-populate the earth by throwing the bones of their mother which they interpret as the stones of the earth.Likewise, Crispin has also to solve the riddle of how “to make a new intelligence prevail” (WSCPP, 30)

However, before being ready for this new approach, Crispin has to face many temptations that put his journey at risk. One of these temptations is a poetic tradition which is

decadent and unrealistic. . For Stevens, the true poet must concern himself further with his surrounding; otherwise, the poet fails to understand and manipulate it.

Again, Crispin is confronted with another natural phenomenon. As he passes through the streets of Yucatan, he is surprised by an approaching thunderstorm. Crispin flees to the cathedral and endures the second temptation of the cathedral. In fact, the emptiness of the cathedral suggests that his experience is not a religious one. In Stevens' world, there is no room for the supernatural addition of nonphysical creatures. For him the world is "all of paradise that me shall know" (WSCPP, 54), and the poet derives pleasure from observing particular objects around him.

Crispin's experiences with the sea, and the storm and the empty cathedral make him ready for the world of the imagination. However, his imagination does not adhere to reality. When Crispin is nearing his poetic home of Carolina which is the ultimate destination of his journey and where he can settle down in his shady home and be a proper poet, he is tempted by an imaginative Carolina. Instead of facing the harshness of the environment of Carolina, he, like a Romantic, finds refuge in an imagination that ignores reality.

Although he claims that he has got off the "last distortion of romance" (WSCPP, 24) when he abandons his subjective roles and becomes a realist in search of the starker realities, Crispin continues to have passion for the exotic which is an extension of an essentially Romantic view of nature which he "never could forget" (WSCPP, 27).Though this kind of conception may seem attractive, it is not sufficiently productive enough. The poet's mere imagination or "legendary moonlight" (WSCPP, 27) succeeds only in distorting reality. He uses a special aspect of nature for his own ends, and his poetry can only be thus "marginal, subliminal" (WSCPP, 712), for a poet who is directly concerned with confronting the visible world. This fanciful view of reality is also unclear. It is like the mist in "Elusive, faint, more mist than moon, perverse" (WSCPP, 27).

After this encounter with a harsh reality, Crispin is purged from his Romantic conception of reality even to such an extent that he can reverse the motto with which he began his voyage. Now his motto is no longer “man is the intelligence of his soil” (WSCPP, 22) but “his soil is man’s intelligence” (WSCPP, 29). As a realist, he accepts the visible world and its infinite variety; he does not merely project on nature his own self-conscious roles. His poetry, too, is deliberately constructed from the anti-romantic. Crispin seems to understand his role at last. As a realist, he accepts the visible world and its infinite variety; he does not merely project on nature his own self-conscious roles. He will avoid the temptation to make Carolina “polar-purple” (WSCPP, 27) ; he will look at things as they are and call them by their proper name: “Abhorring Turk as Esquimau, the lute / As the marimba, the magnolia as rose” (WSCPP, 27). Thus, he recognizes that his apprehension of reality has as its foundation the physical objects which come through the channels of sense: “He savored rankness like a sensualist” (WSCPP, 29).

However, this understanding of reality associates him with the rationalists who argue that what is inside, like the imaginative thinking, that sensation triggers is suspect because it leads to a false view of what is real. For example, Locke’s concrete dualism which makes the word idea stand indifferently for thing, and thought exalts reason but not imagination. In contrast, Stevens believes that “it is the *mundo* of the imagination in which the imaginative man delights and not the gaunt world of reason. The pleasure is the pleasure of powers that create a truth that cannot be arrived at by the reason alone, a truth that the poet recognizes by sensation” (WSCPP, 679). Crispin’s eye is a perceiving eye that gives the power to transform reality when combined with the imagination:

> To things within his actual eye, alert
>
> To the difficulty of rebellious thought
>
> When the sky is blue. The blue infected will.

It may be that the yarrow in his fields

Sealed pensive purple under its concern.

…………………………….

Abashed him by carouse to humble yet

Attach. It seemed haphazard denouement. (WSCPP, 32)

The word "carouse" implies that the things that surround Crispin fluctuate and change. The white "yarrow in his fields" perceived by the senses looks "purple" in his mind thanks to the blue of the sky that comes to mean the blue of the imagination.

Stevens' focus on American soil shows his departure from the international traditions favored by Eliot and Pound and places him in the line of Williams and Crane who rely on the American space as an essential component of American poetry. After the explorations of various American locations, Crispin moves toward a more specific American town of Florida.

6. Return: Settling America and its Locales

After experiencing a series of adventures, it is time for Crispin to go back to the ordinary world. The return is not to Europe with its stale aesthetics but to the new continent which requires new forms of art. The end of his journey finds Crispin back to his quotidian or domestic scene where he began and left confronting the world. He becomes a bourgeois citizen. He marries a "prismy blonde" (WSCPP, 34), acquires property and makes plans to establish himself. Like Deucalion and Pyrrha, Crispin has to repopulate his colony but without the miracle of springing up humans from stones on the ground. Crispin becomes a father of four "chits" or daughters in a natural and not supernatural sense. His daughters are from the actual world and not metaphysical "cloudy" world that Crispin has rejected throughout his journey:

The chits came for his jigging, bluet-eyed,

Hands without touch yet touching poignantly

Leaving no room upon his cloudy knee. (WSCPP, 35)

They will secure the poetic vitality by finding new structures to fit the changing reality. The circumstances of the external world are ever-changing and the mind of the four daughters must respond to produce an art in a harmonious union with the American reality.

7. Conclusion

Stevens' "The Comedian as the Letter C" employs the mythic method as a structuring device to convey his themes universally. The myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha provides a major structural device in Stevens' poem, to show how Classical culture is irrelevant to modern America.

Lecture Four : Stevens' Poetry as a Secular Response to Dante's *The Divine Comedy*

1. Introduction

This lecture deals with Stevens' poetry as an attempt to secularize Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. This secularization requires a revision of Dante's view of evil and pain. Rejecting Dante's view of evil and pain as something alien, Stevens presents them as something natural. Stevens' idea of change which revises Dante's Purgatory is an attempt to assign poetry a humanizing role that was once religions. It also shows how Stevens offers earthly paradise as a substitute for Dante's metaphysical paradise.

2. Stevens and Dante: Challenging the Master's Religious Orthodoxy

Unlike Dante who embraces conventional religion, Stevens rejects any attempt to rehabilitate the traditional beliefs. Instead, he suggests poetry as a substitute, though he does not claim that its function is the creation of a systematic belief. He says in *The Necessary Angel,* "Poetry does not address itself to beliefs. Nor could it ever invent an ancient world full of figures that had been known and become endeared for its reader for centuries" (WSCPP, 731).

3. Stevens' Secular Version of Dante's Evil and Pain

Stevens feels the need to impose the human mind on the world and thus to get rid of the supernatural inhuman otherness of traditional religions. He advocates this secular orientation to the world: "The great poems of heaven and hell have been written, and the great poem of the earth remains to be written" (WSCPP, 730). Owing to Stevens' secular attitudes, the meaning of evil and pain and his response to them changes. He rejects the metaphysical meanings that Dante assigns to evil and pain that looks at pain as a spiritual trial, or evidence of alienation from God, or a discipline through which one attains religious knowledge.

Stevens thinks that pain and evil are part of the world where humans live and can become an element of the larger pleasure of a purely immanent existence.

Christianity as understood by Dante presents an exaggerated picture of the world as evil which engenders an alienation of the humans from the world. Stevens' secular poetics attempts to convince people to consider the world as their only home despite its evil and pain. This is what Stevens means when he says that "the imperfect is our paradise" (WSCPP, 179).

In fact, the impossibility of leading a painless life provides further evidence that humanity is at the centre of the world and not at its margins. Stevens in "On the Adequacy of Landscape," reveals a desire to incorporate pain into an affirmative vision of human life. Pain is the state which forces people to believe, according to Stevens, that they not only belong to this world but they are at its center:

> To avoid the hap-hallow-hallow-ho
> Of central things,
> Nor in their empty hearts to feel
> The blood-redness of the sun,
> To shrink to an insensible,
> Small oblivion,
> Beyond the keenest diamond day
> Of people sensible to pain. (WSCPP, 221)

To be aware of the "diamond day" means to experience human being as something central, rather than marginal, to the life of the world. This may only occur if people are "sensible to pain." Again, pain is not a trial, a challenge to the spirit, or a sign of the fallen world. It is the mark of the world experienced in the intensity of its immanence. If it is a "sign" of anything, it is, as the title suggests, the adequacy of the physical world. But Stevens'

poetry strives to transform the meaning of evil so that it can be accepted as part of the real world rather than a problem that needs to be purged.

4. Stevens's Earthly poetry as Secularizing Version of Dante's Purgatory

In the opening lines of Stevens' "A High-Toned Old Christian Woman" the title character is directly addressed by an unidentified narrator, who proposes poetry as the "supreme fiction." The narrator informs her that if she devotes herself to Christianity by taking "the moral law" and practicing the Christian worship in "the nave" of the church, the heaven she will go is only a "haunted heaven":

> POETRY is the supreme fiction, madame.
>
> Take the moral law and make a nave of it
>
> And from the nave build haunted heaven. (WSCPP, 47)

In fact, much of Stevens' poetry endeavours to find arguments to justify his desire to substitute poetry for religion as a means to reinvigorate people's sense of the world as their home. The first argument has to do with obsoleteness. Christianity is undesirable because it suffers stasis. As a symbol for belief, it has failed to resist the pressure of new reality and is consequently being doubted incredible. The obsoleteness of Christianity is well described in the second section of "Notes toward a Supreme Fiction" entitled "It Must Change," in which images of budding sexuality, fecundity and fruition are juxtaposed with worn-out, withering and decaying images related to Christianity. "Italian girls" (WSCPP, 337) with "jonquils in their hair"(WSCPP, 337) are watched by an "old seraph" (WSCPP, 337), at once an angel symbol of the worn-out Christian religion and a fossil shell. The narrator speaks of "the distaste we feel for this withered scene"(WSCPP, 337).

Stevens advances a second argument which concerns his understanding of poetry as the fusion of the creative imagination and objective reality. He stresses that "the imagination is not a free agent. It is not a faculty that functions spontaneously without reference" (LWS, 58).

The reference is reality or the physical world. Unlike the world of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, which functions in a supernatural world, including Christianity and ancient mythologies, poetry, for Stevens, must concern itself with what is real since it is a result of it.

In "In Evening without Angels," Stevens affirms that the poet who creates the picture of this world does not resort to unreal creatures such as angels hovering in the air paying their heavenly music:

> Air is air
>
> Its vacancy glitters round us everywhere.
>
> Its sounds are not angelic syllables
>
> But our unfashioned spirits realized
>
> More sharply in more furious selves. (WSCPP, 111)

"Air is air" suggests that there is no reality beyond it. The verb "glitters" means that though the air is empty, it is filled with light. The emptiness of the air is desirable with music, there is not angelic but human.

The third argument is related to Stevens' view of the link between poetry, religion and style. Stevens considers both poetry and religion as figments of the imagination. Thus the poets who created gods "were in fact, as we see them now, the clear giants of a vivid time, who in the style of their beings made the style of their Gods and the Gods Themselves One" (WSCPP, 841). Accordingly, both poetry and religion stand for a certain style. The problem is that this style must become obsolete one day. It is the obsolescence of the style of the traditional myths and religion that makes them lose their divinity; and thus, no one cares to fear them anymore nowadays. Poetry, to be worth reading, must have a style in constant change. As an important element of the poetic style, language itself must change. If it embodies the perception of the past in fossilized form, it can hinder rather than further the vital activity of the mind.

The rock, a current symbol of the church, is used for secular purposes. When repeated, it never conveys the same meaning; otherwise, it becomes obsolete and loses its literalness. The rock in the following lines is without its religious characteristics suggested by the notable absence of "chorister" and the "priest":

> There was neither voice nor crested image
> No chorister, nor priest. There was
> Only the great height of rock. (WSCPP, 103)

Though the rock is without its religious attributes as is suggested by the absence of an association between ritual or clergy, its promise is still a secret and with no apparent secular alternative to the absence of religion.

The repetition of the image of the rock in "Credences of the Summer" illustrates well how Stevens changes meanings. In the following lines the rock represents reality as it:

> cannot be broken. It is the truth.
> It rises from land and sea and covers them.
> It is a mountain half way green and then. (WSCPP, 324)

The rock represents the actual "green" world or the physical reality. Outside the imagination, the rock is the only tangible form of assurance; it is the actual world from where poetry can spring. However, poetry is more than the representation of reality as it is. Stevens believes that "the reality is the beginning not the end" (WSCPP, 400), and that poetry intermingles reality and the imagination. For Stevens, poetry is involved in the very instant of the poet's contact with reality and serves as the agent of a new reality born of the fusion of the imagination and the physical world. In the following lines, the image of the rock is associated with the power of the imagination which transmutes bare facts into limitless prospects:

> In this plenty, the poem makes meanings of rock,
> Of such mixed motion and such imagery

That its barrenness becomes a thousand things

And so exists no more. (WSCPP, 446)

5. Stevens Earthly Paradise as Secular Version of Dante's Paradise

While developing an earthly poetics whose substance is everyday world, Stevens does not reject the idea of heaven as long as it is part of earth. This earthly paradise is a counterpart to Dante's paradise which reflects the Christian principle that denies sensual pleasure. For example, in the eighteenth canto of "Paradiso," Dante, near the end of his stay on Mars, sees Beatrice smiling and her smile makes his love so strong that he almost forgets everything divine. She warns him not to make her physical beauty an idol: "for paradise is not only in [her] eyes."[26] Beatrice reminds him that the passion of earthly love is valuable if it is no more than a token of divine love. On the contrary, Stevens chooses to inhabit and to find paradise in this world despite its flaws. He also sees that those who have formulated arguments for the metaphysical world to the detriment of the physical one have at once created a false sense of things and denied the value of life. Stevens states:

The greatest poverty is not to 1ive

In a physical world, to feel that one's desire

Is, too difficult to tell from despair. Perhaps.

After death, the non-physical people, in paradise,

1tself non-physical l, may, by chance, observe

The green corn gleaming and experience

The minor of what we feel. (WSCPP, 226)

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26. Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Henry F. Cary (New York: P. F. Collier and Son Company, 1909), 361.

But the medieval world view "has collapsed heaven, once pictured beyond fixed stars, has no locus in our bound cosmos."[27] Stevens' "Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour" holds the answer. The key line of the poem is "The world imagined is the ultimate good" (WSCPP, 444), good because it offers protection in a world which is dark, cold and indifferent. Imagination as "Single shawl" (WSCPP, 444) and a "candle" brings solace to the speaker. "Single shawl" around himself protects him against the cold, and the candle light illuminates not only his room but also the whole dark world: "that highest candle lights the dark" (WSCPP, 444). The poet, who at first suffers from alienation as he and the world "forget each other," feels now at home in the "dwelling" (WSCPP, 444).

Looking through the "fictive covering"(WSCPP, 342) of the imagination into the universe, reality assumes the appearance of an earthly paradise in which the imagination gives life to static objects. The pleasure of the "supreme fiction" in which the imagination gives life to static objects can also be found in "Study of Two Pears." The poem's first lines introduce the pears that "resemble nothing." The five passive sentences that follow describe the pears in terms of shape and primary colors. The pears have no action and nothing acts upon them:

> They are yellow form
>
> Composed of curves
>
> Bulging toward the base
>
> They are touched red.
>
> They are not flat surfaces
>
> Having curved outlines
>
> They are round
>
> Tapering toward the top. (WSCPP, 180)

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27. John Mahoney, *Seeing Into the Life of Things: Essays on Literature and Religious Experienc*e (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 296.

The first change from this static description comes in a simple active verb “hangs” which forces the two pears to suddenly have an activity and therefore a life within them: “A hard dry leaf hangs / From the stem”(WSCPP, 181). Thus, there is a dramatic shift in “Study of Two Pears” when the leaf hangs from the stem. It is followed with those innate colors suddenly coming to life. “The yellow” is no longer the color of description, but it becomes the subject of a transitive verb:

> The yellow glistens
>
> Glistens with various yellows,
>
> Citrons, oranges and greens
>
> Flowering over the skin. (WSCPP, 181)

The flat effect of the painting has become alive through colors. Citrons and oranges, while colors, are also living fruits. This burst of life in colors is reinforced by the gerund phrase “flowering over the skin.”

6. Conclusion

Stevens’ intertextual relation with Dante reveals the neutrality of Christian authority. In fact, Stevens reworks Dante’s text to exploit the tension between the religious and the secular by challenging the orthodox view that only Christianity can fill the spiritual vacuum in modern societies. He also reverses the ideology of the original text by offering poetry based on reality as the legitimate substitute for religion in modern times.

Lecture Five: Analogy and Allusion against the Subjectivity of Romanticism

1. Introduction

Stevens defines analogy as "the creation of resemblance by imagination" which enables the poet to avoid the interference of the supernatural materials that do not belong to this world and the subjectivity of Romantic poetry because Stevens' concrete objects summon both emotional and intellectual associations.

2. Stevens's Analogy to Objectify Poetry

Stevens' insistence on the common use of concrete and immediately present objects to communicate experiences makes him close to the school of Donne. The following passage exemplifies this idea:

> The man bent over his guitar,
>
> A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.
>
> They said, "You have a blue guitar,
>
> You do not play things as they are."
>
> The man replied, "Things as they are
>
> Are changed upon the blue guitar."
>
> And they said then, "But play, you must
>
> A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,
>
> A tune upon the blue guitar
>
> Of things exactly as they are". (WSCPP, 135)

Reality which is not modified by the imagination is not enough. The green day that is reality must be played by the blue guitar. Thus the blue guitar is the symbol of the poet's imaginative power that enables him to transform the bare reality into imaginative reality.

3. **Stevens' Biblical Allusions:**

In "The Aurora of Autumn," Stevens changes the serpent's habituated feature as the embodiment of the evil, partly responsible for the fall of man, into a naturally tranquil creature looking for a quiet moment of warm tranquility. By bringing the serpent down from the cosmological to the physical, Stevens manages to emphasize the adherence of poetry the physical world and the importance of its changeability. Thus, the snake is "Relentlessly in possession of happiness" (WSCPP, 355). The word "relentless" indicates that the serpent ceaselessly seeks happiness and therefore its constant renewal. In the context of the poem, due to the relentlessness of change, every stable foundation, even the serpent, eventually crumbles. At the beginning of canto I, Stevens establishes a creation myth that will offer new foundations. The serpent encompasses the entirety of the cosmos: "This is where the serpent lives, the bodiless. / His head is air. Beneath his tip at night / Eyes open and fix on us in every sky" (WSCPP, 355). However, Stevens acknowledges the need even for metaphors of creation to change in accordance with the natural, non-metaphysical nature of reality where the serpent lives: "This is his nest, / These fields, these hills, these tinted distances, / And the pines above and along and beside the sea" (WSCPP, 355).

4. Stevens' Dantean Allusion of the Eye:

For Stevens, the eye as "a thing" (WSCPP, 397) implies that it is part of the world. Its "plain version"(WSCPP, 397) suggests that it is not the metaphysical mirror as that held between Beatrice and Dante in The Divine Comedy. In the first section of "Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction" entitled "It Must Be Abstract," the speaker exhorts the ephebe, a student of poetry, to become ignorant and to see the world in "an ignorant eye / And see it clearly in the idea of it" (WSCPP, 329). Yet, the role of the poet is not to reflect bare reality as it is perceived by the ignorant eye but to transform it. The mind captures, translates and explicates the real world on the eye and also imposes a new meaning to reality. The "Ordinary Evening,"

a poem that struggles to unite the real with the imagination, opens with the lines: “The eye’s plain version is a thing apart / The vulgate of experience” (WSCPP, 397).

The same function of the eye as the origin of perception that dictates the content of the mind is found in "Crude Foyer." To be meaningful, the imagination should intermingle with reality. Thus, there is no pure reality of the mind that is not also a physical landscape rooted in the act of the eye’s perception:

> we know that we use
>
> Only the eye as faculty, that the mind
>
> Is the eye, and that this landscape of the mind
>
> Is a landscape only of the eye. (WSCPP, 270)

The eye as an instrument of perception stands between the real world and the imagination. What the eye perceives becomes the driving force of the imaginative mind.

5. Stevens’ Mythical Allusions of Triton

While Classical myths are convenient symbols of their qualities, many of Stevens’ allusions to them are without the expected reverence. Their use serves to highlight the poet’s painful quest for a modern mythology. This is the case with Stevens’ reference to Triton in “Comedian as Letter C.” In this poem, though the allusion to Triton serves to highlight Crispin’s changing conception of reality, Stevens does not treat this Classical divinity reverently.

Triton is an important figure in the story of the flood that Deucalion and Pyrrha experience explaining how the old world is purified of its sins and new race of pious humans is given birth. Being closely associated with this myth, Triton represents the variability and a purging power of the sea. The perilous sea journey that Crispin experiences serves to purify

him from his Romantic pride as the master of the world to the extent that he can reverse completely the note with which he began his voyage that "man is the intelligence of his soil" (WSCPP, 12) into “Note. His soil is man’s intelligence / That’s better” (WSCPP, 29). From here, Crispin has learned that poetry begins and ends in the affluence of the earth and not in the poetry of man’s spirits.

However, Triton is now “dissolved in shifting” (WSCPP, 23) and suffers now from belatedness. In fact, there is “nothing left of him” (WSCPP, 23) that made him such a meaningful deity once in the modern world. Stevens may not be satisfied with his hero Crispin’s resemblance to the ancient Triton. Crispin must have won mythology by way of rejecting other traditional myth. The “ancient Crispin was Dissolved” (WSCPP, 23) in the sea just as Triton was dissolved with the change of time.

6. Stevens’ Natural Allusions: The Seasons as a Way of Seeing the Life of the Imagination Afresh:

In Stevens’ poetic world, each season involves a particular link between the imagination and reality. Kermode also observes that the seasons in Stevens’ poetry are not only “natural analogue to the phases of human life but also as figuring the cyclical nature of the creative imagination.”[28]

Thus, each season has its own significance. Winter is the time of impoverishment since reality is seen as it is and destitute of any imaginative aspect. Yet the bare world of winter is necessary for the imagination because it is the starting point for any activity of the mind. Stevens says that “the imagination loses its vitality as its ceases to adhere to what is real"(WSCPP, 645), and that "the more destitute it [reality] becomes the more it begins to be precious” (WSCPP, 681). It is this world that Stevens describes in his “The Snow Man.” Through imagining a blank mind as a “mind of winter” (WSCPP, 8), the poet seeks to behold

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28. Frank Kermode, *Wallace Stevens* (London: Oliver and Boyld LTD , 1960), 28.

reality without the imagination. What the imagination "beholds" is the bare reality stripped of any imaginative interpretations. Thus,

> the listener who listens in the snow
>
> And, nothing himself, beholds
>
> Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is. (WSCPP, 8)

If winter is the season of the absolute reality, spring is the time of year associated with the beginning of the new cycle of the creative imagination to clothe the nude reality. The need for a new marriage between the imagination and reality in the season of spring is more direct in Stevens' words "Not Ideas About the Thing but the Thing Itself":

> At the earliest ending of winter,
>
> In March, a scrawny cry from outside
>
> Seemed like a sound in his mind.
>
> He knew that he heard it,
>
> A bird's cry, at daylight or before,
>
> In the early March wind.
>
> ……………………………
>
> It was part of the colossal sun,
>
> Surrounded by its choral rings,
>
> Still far away. It was like
>
> A new knowledge of reality. (WSCPP, 451-452)

The poet's imagination returns after its lengthy hibernation that longs until "the earliest ending of winter." March heralds a new period where new imaginative activities are ready to embrace reality as "a new knowledge of reality." It is the season when "a scrawny cry" that comes from reality is reshaped by the imagination to become part of "a sound in his mind."

In “Credences of Summer,” summer is not only the season of the physical paradise, but also of the full human satisfaction when the imagination accounts for reality and makes it more bearable to human beings:

> It is the rock of summer, the extreme,
>
> A mountain luminous half way in bloom
>
> And then half way in the extremest light
>
> Of sapphires flashing from the central sky. (WSCPP, 325)

It is the season when the marriage of the imagination and reality is attained. Reality, not accessible to man as it is in itself, is now constructed by the imagination:

> Postpone the anatomy of summer, as
>
> The physical pine, the metaphysical pine.
>
> ……………………………………..
>
> It is the natural tower of all the world,
>
> The point of survey, green’s green apogee,
>
> But a tower more precious than the view beyond,
>
> A point of survey squatting like a throne,
>
> Axis of everything, green’s apogee
>
> And happiest fold-land, mostly marriage-hymns. (WSCPP, 323)

The interplay between the imagination and reality achieves now a complete harmony creating a flourishing image of “green’s green apogee.” Thus, the summer is the blissful moment when ugly reality is embellished by the imagination.

A new imagination to cope with the new changing reality requires the death of the old one. The season of autumn is employed when the poetic imagination becomes obsolete and loses its credibility. The imagination in autumn fades and needs to purge itself by returning to

the bare reality. In "Motive for Metaphor," the shrinking of human life is like autumn because it passes from ripeness to infertility. His death is as final as the death of the year in autumn:

> You like it under the trees in autumn
>
> Because everything is half-dead
>
> The wind moves like a cripple among the leaves
>
> And repeats words without meaning. (WSCPP, 25)

In many instances, Stevens uses the season of autumn to refer to the death of Christianity as an imagination that belongs to the past and which is no longer credible in modern life. In "The Death of the Soldiers," autumn has two connotations. First, it suggests the death of the soldier. Second, it demystifies the Christian belief in heavenly paradise after death as a dead formula in modern life. Thus, "As in a season of autumn / The soldier falls / He does not become a three-days personage" (WSCPP, 81). This world of autumn represents a negation of the Christian myth and its supernatural event like the Resurrection; the soldiers are subject to "absolute" (WSCPP, 81) and final death. Yet, Stevens recognizes that life still continues since "The clouds go, nevertheless, / In their direction" (WSCPP, 81).

7. Conclusion

Stevens employ the technical devices of analogy and allusions to maintain objectivity and to rid their poetry of the Romantic subjective mode of representation to convey their experiences of contemporary life. These allusions are from tradition but the poet enacts his individual talent to employ them in a different way to see his subject matter in a new light.

Lecture Six: Stevens' Perspectivism and Multiple Truths

1. Introduction

Stevens stresses that "the imagination is not a free agent. It is not a faculty that functions spontaneously without reference."[29] The reference is reality or the physical world where we live. Thus, Stevens rejects both romantic solipsism and rigid rationalism. Accordingly, Stevens denies the existence of an absolute truth and argues that they are just multiple truths.

2. Stevens' Against the Rigid Rationalism

The rationalists argue that what is inside, like the imaginative thinking, that sensation triggers is suspect because it leads to a false view of what is real. For example, Locke's concrete dualism which makes the word idea stand indifferently for thing, and thought exalts reason but not imagination. In contrast, Stevens believes that "it is the mundo of the imagination in which the imaginative man delights and not the gaunt world of reason. The pleasure is the pleasure of powers that create a truth that cannot be arrived at by the reason alone, a truth that the poet recognizes by sensation" (WSCPP, 679). Stevens refutes the rationalist tradition that values reason and empirical observation as the only reliable source of information about the world and about human beings. John Locke's theory of the human mind and epistemology holds that the mind is a non-distorting mirror to the outside world. Like a blank sheet upon which experience inscribes ideas, it is passive to the outside world. From here, poetry's only legitimate role is to depict reality as it is. To quote Alexander Pope:

> True expression, like th' unchanging sun,
>
> Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon,

29.Wallace Stevens, *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (California: University of California Press, 1996), 789.

It guilds all objects, but it alters none. [30]

Stevens rejects this model of relation between the mind and the outside world. He claims that the human mind is capable of processing reality. His refutation of rigid, emotionless, cold Rationalism is the main theme of the last stanza of "Six Significant landscapes" that describes the confining way the rationalists dress, live, and think:

Rationalists, wearing square hats,

Think, in square rooms,

Looking at the floor,

Looking at the ceiling.

They confine themselves

To right-angled triangles.

If they tried rhomboids,

Cones, waving lines, ellipses

As, for example, the ellipse of the half-moon

Rationalists would wear sombreros. (WSCPP, 60)

The rationalists confine themselves to the clear-cut and the indisputable. Due to the limitations on their field of vision, they lack imagination, even joy, in their lives. if they tried other, less "squared" ways of being, again represented analogously by curved, less sharp, and softer geometric figures such as "rhomboids," "cones," "waving lines" and "ellipses," would "wear sombreros," the hats of dance, joy and mirth.

3. The Imagination , Multiple Perspectives and Multiple Truths

Stevens rejects this Lockean concrete understanding of dualism that makes no distinction between reality and thought which satisfies only reason without the imagination. He instead aligns himself with Kant who argues that the mind receives information of the

30. Alexander Pope, *Pope' s Essay On Criticis,* ed. John Churton Collins, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited), 10.

physical world through senses, but in order to understand this information, these sensory perceptions must be processed by certain conditions inherent in the human mind. This Kantian idea has an echo in the following lines of "Bouquet of Roses in Sunlight," in which Stevens explains the effects of the senses on reality:

> Our sense of these things changes as they change,
>
> Not as in metaphor, but in our sense
>
> Of them. So sense exceeds all metaphors.
>
> It exceeds the heavy changes of the light. ((WSCPP, 370)

The repetition of the word "change" emphasizes Stevens' belief that what is in the mind does not reflect reality as it is but transforms it. The he mind is not a passive recipient of the things perceived by the senses; it has to process them.

From the idea of the mind's ability of endless reinvention of reality, truth becomes, according to Stevens, a purely psychological phenomenon, a process of the living organism, and it is in this place that poetic inspiration takes place. In this context we can say that there is not a truth; there are as many truths as there are men "since no one sees the same as anyone else does." For Stevens appreciation " is like flow of meaning with no speech / And of as many meanings as of men."

Truth as a psychological phenomenon and not as a metaphysical entity is the main theme of "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird". In this poem, Stevens argues not for "the truth" but for "truths". The poem consists of thirteen brief haiku-like fragments in no discernible order. The blackbird marks its physical presence in each of these fragments and becomes a center of focus around which a brief scene is described briefly. He does this to make each stanza an explanation of a new perspective from which he perceives this blackbird. A particular passage, say

> A man and a woman

Are one.

A man and a woman and a blackbird

Are one.

must be connected only through the presence of blackbirds with what comes after:

I do not know which to prefer,

The beauty of inflection s

Or the beauty of innuendoes,

The blackbird whistling

Or just after. (WSCPP, 75)

Neither style nor convention (stanza or line lengths, rhythm, etc.) nor "theme" pulls these passages together into anything approaching sustained and coherent thought or feeling. In order to give this sense of the multiplicity of seeing, Stevens uses a cubist technique which is perspectivism. Indeed the poem includes directly this technique of perspectivism as a theme is in the ninth stanza:

When the blackbird flew out of sight,

It marked the edge

Of one of many circles. (WSCPP, 76)

This is a way of saying that the world contains not one sense but many. Each sense of the blackbird defines an intelligible circle, the "meaning" of which exists only until the blackbird crosses its horizon. In this view, we can say the poem illustrates Nietzsche's idea that the world "has not one sense behind it, but hundreds of senses," [31]and that "there are many kinds of eyes . . . therefore there must be many kinds of truths." [32] "Thirteen Ways" is

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31. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Dawn of Day* (London: T. N. Foulis, 1911),122.

32. Ibid.

built on the idea that each sense of the world is a new way of seeing, confined to its own unique perspective, and each has its origin in the perceiver. This idea has its parallel in the following quotation from Nietzsche' s *The Dawn of Day*: “We measure the world by these horizons within which our senses confine each of us”[33]; thus, “a concentric circle is drawn round every being.” (WSCPP, 76) Accordingly the idea of the multiple truths the poem suggests assumes that one's current perspective is enlarged. This is what Stevens’s poem “On the Road Home” asserts:

> It was when I said,
> “There is no such thing as the truth.
> That the grapes seemed fatter,
> The fox ran out of his hole. . . . (WSCPP, 186)

The above lines accentuate Stevens’s belief that maturity suggested by “grapes seemed fatter” and freedom conveyed by “the fox ran out of his hole” come only after man discovers that there is no absolute truth. This recalls Nietzsche’s view that “plurality in interpretation is a sign of strength” because it does not rob the world of its “disquieting and enigmatical nature.”

4. Conclusion

From the idea of the mind’s ability of endless reinvention of reality, truth becomes, according to Stevens, a purely psychological phenomenon, a process of the living organism, and it is in this place that poetic inspiration takes place. In this context, there is not a truth; there are as many truths as there are men "since no one sees the same as anyone else does. Thus, for Stevens is neither solipsistic nor rational.

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33. Ibid.

Lecture Seven: Stevens and the Contemporaries: French Symbolism and Imagism

1- Introductions

The purpose of this lecture is to reveal the intertextual relation between Stevens' poetry and the various avant-garde movements in literature and the visual arts. It investigates how Stevens manipulates and transforms the tenets of French Symbolism and Imagism to protect their poetry against sentimentality, solipsism, and escapism of Romanticism.

2- Stevens' Search for Redeeming the Symbolists Unreal City

Stevens nevertheless learned from the Symbolists how to explore a gloomy urban environment and to translate its experience into poetry. In many of Stevens' poems, the circumstances of daily life in urban settings are the central subject. For example, the poem "The Man with the Blue Guitar" brings the poet in front of the reality of the city where the images of the Romantics are useless in the present chaos of the urban life:

> There is no place,
> Here, for the lark fixed in the mind,
> In the museum of the sky. The cock
> Will claw sleep. Morning is not sun,
> It is this posture of the nerves. (WSCPP, 150)

According to Elean Cook, the lark is a reference to Shelley's "Ode to skylark" in which Shelley seeks the aesthetic enjoyment of nature. However, in the urban environment there is no place for an absolute and idyllic conception of nature. It is an environment which rejects the presence of the morning sun because morning is a posture of the nerves in which a poet blunted by business civilization desperately grasps the nuances of poetry.[34] This romantic

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34. Sukenick, *Wallace Stevens: Musing the Obscure*, 101.

natural world which is “detached from the thing-in- itself relegated to the museum of the past”[35] will no longer serve in the present chaos.

For Stevens, “The poetry of a work of the imagination constantly illustrates the fundamental and endless struggle with fact”. The imagination is “violence within that protects us from violence without. It is the imagination pressing against the pressure of reality” (WSCPP, 665).This idea that the poet is at war against the urban environment is evoked in the following passage from “The Man with the Blue Guitar”:

> To create is “to live at war,
>
> To chop the sullen psaltery,
>
> To improve the sewers in Jerusalem,
>
> To electrify the nimbuses”. (WSCPP, 142)

The passage implies two main ideas. First, the world the poet has to face is no longer the green world, but the urban industrial waste land of “sewers” and “electrif[ied] nimbuses.” Secondly, given this environment, urbanization (the sewers) intrudes upon the spirituality of “Jerusalem” so that no consolations offered by traditional religion are possible.

However, Stevens, opposes Baudelaire’s effort to find relief from the discomfort of the city in alcohol, blasphemy or death. The decline of spirituality would allow to free the poet’s imagination from the ancient religious hindrances and to represent the urban world transformed by the imagination yet still recognizable as part of the here and now.

In “The Man with the Blue Guitar,” Stevens wants to concentrate on a world “without [the] shadows” (WSCPP, 144) of the metaphysical additions of traditional religion. This world, which is also very different from the idealized nature found in Romantic poetry, is made of such every day common elements as “The flesh, the bone, the dirt, and the stone” (WSCPP, 144). Stevens calls this world “Oxidia” (WSCPP, 149). It is a suburban

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35. Daniel Tompsett, *Wallace Stevens and Pre-Socratic Philosophy: Metaphysics and the Play of Violence* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 59.

environment whose banal values are expressed in monetary terms and whose communication has been reduced to electronic messages transmitted over telephone poles:

> From this I shall evolve a man.
> This is his essence: the old fantoche
> Hanging his shawl upon the wind,
> Like something on the stage, puffed out,
> His strutting studied through centuries.
> At last, in spite of his manner, his eye
> A-cock at the cross piece on a pole
> Supporting heavy cables, slung
> Through Oxidia, banal suburb,
> One-half of all its installments paid. (WSCPP, 149)

Despite the ugly nature of Oxidia, the poet is ready to accept it and to live beyond it. In other words, he relies on his imagination to transform mundane objects, such as the "heavy cables" that sails over the suburb into the subject of poetry. Thus, the imagination sanctifies everyday reality and lifts it to the level the myth of Olympia:

> Ecce, Oxidia is the seed
> Dropped out of this amber-ember pod,
> Oxidia is the soot of fire,
> Oxidia is Olympia. (WSCPP, 149)

3. Stevens and Imagism

In search of images to discard the excessive effusion of emotions and indulgence in beauty of Romantic poetry, Stevens further sought inspiration from the Imagists[36] who, like the Symbolists, chose to distance themselves from the over-subjective Romantic poetry and

[36]. The term "Imagist" was conjured by Ezra Pound to characterize the style of recent work by his friends and collaborators, the American Hilda Doolittle (H. D.) and the Englishman Richard Aldington.

argued for a renewed emphasis on the object-like nature of the art-work. Pound put in place a program for Imagism, a movement which would have several tenets. The major tenets include "direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective," [37] and "rigorous economy in use of words, and composition." [38] As for the image, Pound insisted on the image "which presents an intellectual or emotional complex in an instant of time."[39]

With these rules in place, Pound began writing a radically different kind of poetry which was at once more visual and more concise than the Romantic poetry. This can easily be seen in Pound's most famous Imagist poem, "In a Station of the Metro": "The apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough." [40] The entire poem deals with images alone. The two images that stand out are "apparition" and "Petal." The poet is able to link the natural world of petals and boughs with the modern urban environment of the metro station.

Since Stevens' goals in poetry are not the same as the Imagists', his poems showed qualities quite distinct from theirs. In other words, though Stevens is attracted to the Imagist concrete objectivity which avoids sentimentality through the use of visual images, his poetry challenges, in its far greater tendency to abstraction and philosophical arguments, the Imagist tenets. To understand better how Stevens adheres to Imagism and how he distances himself from it, it is relevant to examine: "Domination of Black," and a passage from "Sunday Morning."

In "Domination of Black," visual images like "the fire" (WSCPP, 7), "the bushes" (WSCPP, 7), "fallen leaves" (WSCPP, 7), and "peacocks" (WSCPP, 7) are predominant. However, this poem departs from Imagism in many ways. As there are no descriptive terms

37. Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos and Stephen Adams, *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia* (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005), 227.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ezra Pound, quoted in Demetres P. Tryphonopoulos and Stephen Adams, *The Ezra Pound Encyclopedia* (New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005), 227.

given to these concrete objects, the poem is less interested in the objects of the poem than in their movement:

> Was it a cry against the twilight
>
> Or against the leaves themselves
>
> Turning in the wind, Turning as the flames
>
> Turned in the fire,
>
> Turning as the tails of the peacocks
>
> Turned in the loud fire,
>
> Loud as the hemlocks
>
> Full of the cry of the peacocks. (WSCPP, 7)

The movement of the things implies Stevens' "rejection of permanent (or static) ideal and with this embracing of the world of time and change."[41]

Moreover, these visual series or images are not enough to understand the importance of change. The poem further evokes such acoustic images as "the cry of the peacocks," a cry against the hemlock trees. The shift from vision to sound in the final stanzas is itself an example of Stevens' own movement away from the Imagist representation toward more abstract modes of poetic thinking and writing. Thus, the hemlock trees as poisonous trees serve as a reminder of death. Yet, Stevens assures that even planets which might be imagined stationary move and change like the fire, the leaves and peacocks:

> Out of the window,
>
> I saw how the planets gathered
>
> Like the leaves themselves
>
> Turning in the wind. (WSCPP, 7)

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41. Brogan, *Stevens and Simile,* 20.

The second example of Stevens' relation to Imagist practice can be found in the following passage from "Sunday Morning":

> Why should she give her bounty to the dead?
> What is divinity if it can come
> Only in silent shadows and in dreams?
> Shall she not find in comforts of the sun,
> In pungent fruit and bright green wings, or else
> In any balm or beauty of the earth,
> Things to be cherished like the thought of heaven?
> Divinity must live within herself:
> Passions of rain, or moods in falling snow;
> Grievings in loneliness, or unsubdued
> Elations when the forest blooms; gusty
> Emotions on wet roads on autumn nights. (WSCPP, 53)

Though Stevens presents a rich array of visual images to describe the woman's dilemma, this passage departs from the Imagist practice in three ways. First, Stevens' images go beyond a strict Imagist perception of the scene. They function as a means to support a philosophical argument between the nostalgia for religious belief and the acceptance of a secular world.

Second, the images are not presented in direct visual aids as the Imagist does. Instead, Stevens adopts a technique of combining abstract words with concrete images as "*comforts* of the sun," "*p*u*ngen*t fruit," "*bright green* wings," "*beauty* of the earth," "*Passions* of rain," "*moods* in falling snow," "*Elations* when the forest blooms," and " *Emotions* on wet roads."" The italicized words are used as abstract modifiers of the visual images and the meaning depends on the denotations and connotations of the two words. These combinations show that

the spiritual fulfilment is to be found in “the comfort of the sun” and “the beauty of the earth.” However, this secular setting cannot completely dispel the “holy hush” (WSCPP, 53) of Christ’s sacrifice and his crucifixion. What Stevens suggests, instead, is a secular religion based on transitory things, a religion that offers “the emotion of religion without the theology, and in the poem the negation of religion produces a freeing and proliferation of feeling of all kinds: passions, moods, grievings, elations, emotions.” [42]

Third, as her religious thoughts begin to supplant her secular awareness of the scene, the visual images used to describe the scene of the woman taking her breakfast are replaced by aural images presented in the negation: “without sound” and “silent Palestine.” The tension between energetic visual images of the world of the senses and the silent auditory images of religious devotions supports the argument the poem will make: Christianity is no longer credible in the modern world, and the humans should content with their natural surroundings.

4. Conclusion

Stevens’s poetry is a response to his contemporaries, namely French Symbolism, Imagism and Cubism. Through this examination, it is revealed that Stevens is not only influenced by the innovative movements currently taking place around him. However, far from being slavish followers of these movements, Stevens borrows tenets of French symbolism and Imagism and adapts them to his own poetic purposes.

42. J. Hillis "Miller on the Eloquence of the Poem's Mental," *Wallace Stevens,* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 2003), 33.

Lecture Eight: Stevens and Cubism: Collage and Perspectivism

1. Introduction

The purpose of this lecture is to reveal the intertextual relation between Stevens' poetry and the various avant-garde movements in the visual arts. It investigates how Stevens manipulates and transforms the cubist techniques of Collage and Perspectivism to protect their poetry against sentimentality, solipsism, and escapism of Romanticism.

2. Cubism and its Context

Cubism emerged during an era of dissatisfaction with positivism and its claims to absolute truth which was attacked by Friedrich Nietzsche, William James, and Albert Einstein. *In Genealogy of Morals,* Friedrich Nietzsche rejects the possibility of an absolute objective truth and underlies that "there is only a perspectival seeing, only a perspectival 'knowing'; the more affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the more eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our 'concept' of the thing, our 'objectivity'."[43] James denies any knowledge that is absolute in character. He claims that the interpretations of facts have perspectival dimensions: "there is no possible point of view from which the world can appear as absolutely single fact."[44] Breaking up with classical physics which assumed that all observers anywhere in the universe would obtain identical measurements of space and time intervals Albert Einstein relativity asserts that "measurements change when considered by observers in various states of motion."[45]

3. Analytical Cubism and Multiple Perspectives

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43. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 87.
44. William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy, and Human Immortality* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956.), ix.
45. Jo, Storm, *Approaching the Possible: The World of Stargate* (Torento: ECW Press, 2007), 194.

The Cubist painters Picasso and Braque rejected the traditional linear perspective based on the idea of a single viewpoint from one fixed point in space, and at a fixed point in time because "it cannot capture objects completely."[46] Picasso and Braque's solution was Analytical Cubism in which the subject is depicted from a multitude of viewpoints to represent it in a greater context. This technique enables the viewer to see several angles of the same subject. Later Picasso and Braque invented another form of Cubism known as Synthetic Cubism.

4. Synthetic Cubism and Collage

Instead of breaking down an object into fragments and then re-assembling them in Analytical Cubism, in Synthetic Cubism the image is built from new elements and shapes. The main technique the artist uses is collage. He composes paintings with integrated pieces of bedspread, oilcloths, and rope as in *Still Life with Chair Caning*. The rope makes up the frame of the picture while the chair caning is pasted onto the lower left hand corner of the canvas.

5. Stevens' Perspectivism: Secular Multiple Perceptions of Reality

In "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," he embraces the Cubist technique of multiple perspectives to move beyond the Romantic personal and single view of the real and to represent the object from many angles simultaneously. Like a Cubist painting, the poem is divided into thirteen individual separate stanzas where the only constantly present image is the blackbird in order to suggest a variety of possible viewpoints. The first stanza introduces a contrast between the moving eye of the blackbird and the fixed landscape of "twenty snowy mountains": "Among twenty snowy mountains, / The only moving thing / Was the eye of the blackbird." (WSCPP, 74)

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46. Arthur I. Miller, *Insights of Genius: Imagery and Creativity in Science and Art* (New York: Springer New York, 1996), 419.

The blackbird with its presence and movement becomes a center of focus around which a scene is described briefly. He does this to make each stanza an explanation of a new perspective from which he perceives this blackbird. The following passage

> A man and a woman
>
> Are one.
>
> A man and a woman and a blackbird
>
> Are one. (WSCPP, 75)

is related to the following passage only through the existence of the blackbird

> I do not know which to prefer,
>
> The beauty of inflections
>
> Or the beauty of innuendoes,
>
> The blackbird whistling
>
> Or just after. (WSCPP, 75)

The eye of the blackbird approaches reality with the multiplicity of seeing. This perception of reality is the same as the technique of perspectives. The ninth stanza of the poem includes directly this technique of perspectivism:

> When the blackbird flew out of sight,
>
> It marked the edge
>
> Of one of many circles. (WSCPP, 76)

This is another way of saying that the world contains not one sense but many. Each sense of the blackbird defines an intelligible circle, the "meaning" of which exists only as far as the blackbird crosses its horizon. In this view, the poem illustrates the Cubist idea that "there is nothing real outside ourselves; there is nothing real except the coincidence of a sensation and an individual mental tendency. . . . An object has not one absolute form: it has

many: it has as many as are planes in the region of perception."[47] "Thirteen Ways" is built on the idea that each sense of the world is a new way of seeing, confined to its own unique perspective, and each with its origin in the perceiver. This idea has its parallel in the following quotation from Judith Rinde Sheridan: "Once it is understood that at best an artistic replication of nature is not the thing itself but a sign, an image accepted by the viewer as the object, then the sign can assume many forms to embody the dynamism of man's perceptions of objects."[48]

6. Stevens' Collage: Decreation and Reimagining Reality

Stevens' attempt to solve the problem of the Romantic incapability of abstraction resulting from the imagination's usurpation of reality brought him closer to Cubism. To better illustrate this idea, it is helpful to examine Stevens' poem "The Man with the Blue Guitar."

Stevens uses different objects to achieve a good awareness of the natural objects to accentuate the fact that poetry belongs to the physical world rather than the imaginative worlds of the Romantic poetry that is completely isolated from reality as

> the fruit and wine,
> The book and bread, things as they are.
> At a table on which the food is cold?
> Is my thought a memory, not alive? (WSCPP, 142)

These dissimilar objects are put by the poet's imagination together to make a complete entity. This gathering activity resembles the Cubist collage that welds fragments into a new conceptual unity:

> ...are these separate? (...)
> A few final solutions, like a duet (...)

47. Herschel Browning Chipp and Peter Selz, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (London: University of California Press, 1968), 295.
48. Judith Rinde Sheridan, "The Picasso Connection: Wallace Stevens' The Man With the Blue Guitar,"*Arizona Quarterly 3(1979):79.*

The grunted breath serene and final,

The imagined and the real, thought

And the truth, Dichtung and Wahrheit, all

Confusion solved, as in a refrain. (WSCPP, 145)

Stevens goes beyond the Romantic failure to achieve reconciliation between reality and the imagination. In fact, the interplay between reality and the imagination solves the confusions of the fragmentary world.

7. Stevens' Cubism for Decreation

The cubist centerlessness is an antichristian feature. This quest for the center has long been understood to be a religious pursuit. For Christianity, that centre is imaged in God. For example, Dante in "Paradiso" compares God to a wheel as the fixed center that makes the universe move:

like Wheel

In even motion by the Love impell'd,

That moves the sun in Heaven and all the stars.[49]

Stevens' Cubism is a struggle to find a way of inhabiting this ever-changing, imperfect, contingent, centerless world without resorting to doctrines that attempt to still the motion. Leaving his Christian heritage behind, claiming its irrelevance to the modern world, Stevens is interested not in fixing a centre point, but in living with the desire for an impossible centre. The desire for an elusive middle point and the yearning for a place in which to dwell perpetually is often a subject for his poems:

It would be enough

If we were ever, just once, at the middle, fixed

In This Beautiful World of Ours and not as now,

[49]. Dante, *Divine Comedy*, 426.

Helplessly at the edge, enough to be

Complete, because at the middle, if only in sense,

And in that enormous sense, merely enjoy. (WSCPP, 370)

8. **Conclusion**

Stevens' use of cubist techniques of Collage and Perspectivism has a many implications. It enables him to secularize and objectify poetry. It also enables him to argue that there is no absolute but just multiple truths.

Lecture Nine: One: Introductory Element to William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*

1. Introduction

This lecture is a background against which William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* was written. It examines the biography of the author and the context in which this novel was written particularly the decline of the Deep South after the Civil War. This decline led to the deterioration of the Southern aristocracy after the destruction of its wealth and way of life during the Civil War and Reconstruction which the novel explores.

2. Life and Background of the Author

Among Faulkner's total body of works, *As I Lay Dying* stands as a companion piece to *The Sound and the Fury*, the novel published the year preceding the publication of *As I Lay Dying*. The earlier novel is a criticism and condemnation of the so-called "aristocracy" of the South; the latter, a criticism and condemnation of the backwoods hill people who, through their ignorance, deny any value to life. Other similarities between these two novels are readily noticeable. A mother who affects the destiny of her children, levels of awareness presented through startling techniques, and characters who advocate a nihilistic philosophy are seen in both novels. Darl's searching questions into the meaning of life strongly suggest the disturbed personality of Quentin Compson (the son in *The Sound and the Fury*), and in a vaguer sense, Benjy's idiocy is again reflected in Vardaman.

William Faulkner (1897-1962) was born in New Albany, Mississippi, but his family soon moved to Oxford, Mississippi. The action of almost all of his novels takes place in and around Oxford, which he renames Jefferson, Mississippi. Faulkner, therefore, was very familiar with the type of person presented through the characters of the Bundrens. Even though Faulkner is a contemporary American, he is already considered one of the world's greatest novelists. In 1949, he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, the highest prize

awarded to a writer. Most of Faulkner's novels probe deeply into the mores and morals of the South. He was not hesitant to criticize any aspect of the South. This may seem surprising since Faulkner came from a rather distinguished Mississippi family. His grandfather, Colonel William Culbert Falkner (the "u"was added to Faulkner's name by mistake when his first novel was published and he retained this spelling), came to Mississippi from South Carolina during the first part of the nineteenth century. The colonel appears in many of Faulkner's novels under the name of Colonel John Sartoris. Colonel William Falkner had a rather distinguished career as a soldier both in the Mexican War and the Civil War. During the Civil War, Falkner's hot temper caused him to be demoted from full colonel to lieutenant colonel. After the war, Falkner was heavily involved in the problems of the reconstruction period. He killed several men during this time and became a rather notorious figure. He also built a railroad and ran for public office; he was finally killed by one of his rivals. During all of these involved activities, he took time to write one of the nation's bestsellers, *The White Rose of Memphis*, which appeared in 1880. He also wrote two other books but only his first was an outstanding success. The intervening members of the Falkner family are not quite so distinguished as was the great-grandfather. With the publication of his third novel, Sartoris, Faulkner placed his novels in a mythological county which he called Yoknapatawpha County. The county seat was Jefferson, the town to which the Bundrens are carrying Addie to be buried. Most of the rest of Faulkner's novels take place in this county. Some of the characters in *As I Lay Dying* have already appeared in a preceding novel or will appear in a later work. The Tulls and the Armstids appear in several short stories and in a couple of other novels but not as main characters. Peabody appears in several places. The wild horse that Jewel possesses is the subject of one of Faulkner' s most successful short novels, *Spotted Horses.* Thus, one of Faulkner's great achievements is the creation of this imaginary county. He worked out his plan so carefully that we feel we know a character when he later appears in

another work. With the publication of *Absalom, Absalom*! in 1936, Faulkner even drew a map of this county and showed the places where certain events took place. In all of his work, Faulkner has used new techniques to express his views of man's position in the modern world. In his early works, Faulkner viewed with despair man's position in the universe. He saw man as a weak creature incapable of rising above his selfish needs. Later, Faulkner's view changed. In his more recent works, Faulkner sees man as potentially great, or, as he expressed it in his Nobel Prize speech and in *A Fable*, "man will not merely endure; he will prevail." But in almost all of his novels, Faulkner penetrated deeply into the psychological motivations for man's actions and the dilemma in which modern man finds himself. Of *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner writes that he wrote it in six weeks while working on the night shift (from twelve midnight to six A.M.) in a heating plant. He would fire up the boilers, then, using an overturned wheelbarrow, he would write until the boilers needed firing again. Of Faulkner's many achievements, this novel is one of his most popular.

3. The American South

The American South has long been a topic of fascination and study to the rest of the world. It is a region and a people of rich, yet tumultuous history, devastated by war, poverty, natural disaster, political corruption, and violent racism. Regardless of its glory or brokenness, it is a region worth studying. The South rose to power in the nineteenth century as a region of economic prosperity built upon the wildly successful plantation system, which used mass slave labor to grow and produce cotton: the ultimate cash crop that put the region on the global market. The plantation system defined the region's social hierarchy. Wealthy white planters controlled the politics, economy, and strict social order. While the rest of the country was advancing quickly towards urbanization and industrialization, the South chose to stay firmly agrarian. But the southern planters were fighting a losing battle with the federal government for control over their slaves, and thus, their livelihoods. After eleven southern

states seceded from the Union in 1861 and the American Civil War began, many white southerners went to fight not only for the protection of slavery, but also for a way of life they had always known. What would life be like for southerners with no mass labor system, no social order, and no effective politics? When the war ended in 1865, the defeated South lay in ruin. After a failed Reconstruction, southerners struggled to pick up the pieces. Devastated by war, natural disaster, political anarchy, racial brutality, disease, and poverty, southerners were left with an exhausted land, a lost cause, a broken ideology, and rampant violence.

4. Plot Overview

Addie Bundren the wife of Anse Bundren and the matriarch of a poor southern family, is very ill, and is expected to die soon. Her oldest son, Cash, puts all of his carpentry skills into preparing her coffin, which he builds right in front of Addie's bedroom window. Although Addie's health is failing rapidly, two of her other sons, Darl and Jewel, leave town to make a delivery for the Bundrens' neighbor, Vernon Tull, whose wife and two daughters have been tending to Addie. Shortly after Darl and Jewel leave, Addie dies. The youngest Bundren child, Vardaman, associates his mother's death with that of a fish he caught and cleaned earlier that day. With some help, Cash completes the coffin just before dawn. Vardaman is troubled by the fact that his mother is nailed shut inside a box, and while the others sleep, he bores holes in the lid, two of which go through his mother's face. Addie and Anse's daughter, Dewey Dell, whose recent sexual liaisons with a local farmhand named Lafe have left her pregnant, is so overwhelmed by anxiety over her condition that she barely mourns her mother's death. A funeral service is held on the following day, where the women sing songs inside the Bundren house while the men stand outside on the porch talking to each other. Darl, who narrates much of this first section, returns with Jewel a few days later, and the presence of buzzards over their house, lets them know their mother is dead. On seeing this sign, Darl sardonically reassures Jewel, who is widely perceived as ungrateful and uncaring,

that he can be sure his beloved horse is not dead. Addie has made Anse promise that she will be buried in the town of Jefferson, and though this request is a far more complicated proposition than burying her at home, Anse's sense of obligation, combined with his desire to buy a set of false teeth, compels him to fulfill Addie's dying wish. Cash, who has broken his leg on a job site, helps the family lift the unbalanced coffin, but it is Jewel who ends up manhandling it, almost single-handedly, into the wagon. Jewel refuses, however, to actually come in the wagon, and follows the rest of the family riding on his horse, which he bought when he was young by secretly working nights on a neighbor's land. On the first night of their journey, the Bundrens stay at the home of a generous local family, who regards the Bundrens' mission with skepticism. Due to severe flooding, the main bridges leading over the local river have been flooded or washed away, and the Bundrens are forced to turn around and attempt a river-crossing over a makeshift ford. When a stray log upsets the wagon, the coffin is knocked out, Cash's broken leg is reinjured, and the team of mules drowns. Vernon Tull sees the wreck, and helps Jewel rescue the coffin and the wagon from the river. Together, the family members and Tull search the riverbed for Cash's tools. Cora, Tull's wife, remembers Addie's unchristian inclination to respect her son Jewel more than God. Addie herself, speaking either from her coffin or in a leap back in time to her deathbed, recalls events from her life: her loveless marriage to Anse; her affair with the local minister, Whitfield, which led to Jewel's conception; and the birth of her various children. Whitfield recalls traveling to the Bundrens' house to confess the affair to Anse, and his eventual decision not to say anything after all. A horse doctor sets Cash's broken leg, while Cash faints from the pain without ever complaining. Anse is able to purchase a new team of mules by mortgaging his farm equipment, using money that he was saving for his false teeth and money that Cash was saving for a new gramophone, and trading in Jewel's horse. The family continues on its way. In the town of Mottson, residents react with horror to the stench coming from the Bundren

wagon. While the family is in town, Dewey Dell tries to buy a drug that will abort her unwanted pregnancy, but the pharmacist refuses to sell it to her, and advises marriage instead. With cement the family has purchased in town, Darl creates a makeshift cast for Cash's broken leg, which fits poorly and only increases Cash's pain. The Bundrens then spend the night at a local farm owned by a man named Gillespie. Darl, who has been skeptical of their mission for some time, burns down the Gillespie barn with the intention of incinerating the coffin and Addie's rotting corpse. Jewel rescues the animals in the barn, then risks his life to drag out Addie's coffin. Darl lies on his mother's coffin and cries. The next day, the Bundrens arrive in Jefferson and bury Addie. Rather than face a lawsuit for Darl's criminal barn burning, the Bundrens claim that Darl is insane, and give him to a pair of men who commit him to a Jackson mental institution. Dewey Dell tries again to buy an abortion drug at the local pharmacy, where a boy working behind the counter claims to be a doctor and tricks her into exchanging sexual services for what she soon realizes is not an actual abortion drug. The following morning, the children are greeted by their father, who sports a new set of false teeth and, with a mixture of shame and pride, introduces them to his new bride, a local woman he meets while borrowing shovels with which to bury Addie.

5. Conclusion

The historical and biographical elements, particularly the decline of the Deep South after the Civil War and the deterioration of the Southern aristocracy, pervade much of Joyce's novel. Though the central problem of the novel involved the reasons for Addie's request to be buried and why her family defies fire and water to fulfill it, the burial journey is a motif through which the author presents his thematic concerns.

Lecture Ten: The Presence of Religion in *As I Lay Dying*

1. Introduction

This lecture examines the presence of religion in *As I Lay Dying*. It looks closely at the way in which some characters fulfil the role of a Christ-figure. In *As I Lay Dying*, this role is attributed to Jewel, Cash and Darl. In Faulkner's novel, religion is very dominant because of the presence of Cora Tull. Her belief in God is so strong that it becomes ridiculed. This lecture also deals with the traits of the sinner Addie, the irresponsible Ansel and the moderate Vernon Tull from Christian perspectives

2. Jewel, Cash and Darl as new Versions of Christ

In this novel, Jewel and Cash combine qualities to become an imitation of Christ, namely. This representation is a rather comic one, which does not lead to a consistent portrayal of moral behaviour but an exercise in pessimistic irony. When you put those two characters together, their initials will show the consonants Hauck encourages the reader to look for: J.C. These two consonants bring together Jewel's power and sacrifice and Cash's ability, perception, and acceptance. The character that shows most resemblances to Christ is Jewel Bundren, first and foremost because of Addie's prediction that he will save her from flood and fire. He also makes the greatest sacrifice he can make to bury his mother: he sells his horse. Like Christ, he is not the offspring of a worldly marriage; his father is an emissary of God. He was, however, not conceived by the Holy Ghost, but is the result of a brief, yet passionate affair between his mother and Minister Whitfield. The most crucial differences, however, are that he is the instrument of revenge rather than forgiveness, and that he becomes Darl's betrayer instead of a saviour.

Cash Bundren also has some physical and psychological qualities in common with Christ. The physical characteristic is the most obvious one: after he has fallen from the wagon

and has to move on with a broken leg, Cash is laid down on his mother's coffin in the form of a crux, resembling Christ's suffering on the cross. He also possesses the same perceptiveness as Christ, offering solutions for all kinds of problems. The solutions, however, differ in essence. While Christ advocates faith as the solution to everything, Cash turns to pragmatism relying on facts and the discovery of truth through science and experience. He is often described in connection to his tools, which shows that he tends to solve problems by gaining control over the world around him rather than believing in God's providence. He is the one who answers to his mother's death by building a perfect coffin for her. Even though Jewel and Cash embody Christ-like qualities, eventually they help carry out Addie's revenge in bringing her all the way to Jefferson, and thus become powers of damnation rather than salvation. They serve Faulkner's intention of presenting the failure of Christianity.

The only true Christ-like figure in the novel is Darl Bundren (504). Addie states that Jewel is the one who will save her from water and fire, and this turns out to be true, but it is Darl who undertakes action to save her from damnation. From one of his conversations with Vardaman, it becomes clear that he realizes that Addie is neither dead nor alive as long as her body will continue to rot above the ground

> "Hear?" Darl says. "Put your ear close." I put my ear close and I can hear her. Only I cant tell what she is saying. "What is she saying, Darl?" I say. "Who is she talking to?" "She's talking to God," Darl says. "She is calling on Him to help her." "What does she want Him to do?" I say. "She wants Him to hide her away from the sight of man," Darl says. (126).

It is crucial for Addie that the humiliation comes to an end; she has been the object of negative attention for far too long. Ironically enough, it is the one who shows the most moral judgement that is sent to a mental institution. Addie wanted to take vengeance on the entire

family, and especially Anse, but in the end it is only the one who wanted to spare her from further damnation that is punished.

3. Cora Tull as a Fanatic Ridiculed Christian Woman

The character that deserves special attention here is Cora Tull, who is always described in connection to her obsessive belief in God. Her piety receives so much emphasis that it cannot be ignored, but is easy ridiculed. She tries so hard to relate everything to God that she seems to lose touch with reality. When Addie literally states that Jewel will be her cross and salvation, saving her from flood and fire, Cora realizes that Addie means Jewel and not God, and she is horrified that Addie puts her trust in that boy rather than in the Lord. In this part of the novel, her last section, Cora completely loses track of reality and tries to persuade Addie to turn to God again: “I begged her to kneel and open her heart and cast from it the devil of vanity and cast herself upon the mercy of the Lord. But she wouldn’t. She just sat there, lost in her vanity and pride that had closed her heart to God and set that selfish mortal boy in His place.” (99)

When her husband Vernon Tull tells her that the wagon the Bundrens were crossing the river with had turned over into the water, and that Anse was not on it while it happened, she says that “[i]f he had been a man, he would a been there instead of making his sons do what he dursn’t” (90). On the other hand, she also states that it was not because of the log that the wagon toppled, but because it was the will of God. Vernon confronts her with this contradiction, “[o]ne breath you say they was daring the hand of God to try it, and the next breath you jump on Anse because he wasn’t with them.” (90). She tries so hard to relate everything to God that she seems to lose touch with reality, but also her credibility as a narrator. The most obvious example concerns the fact that she believes that Addie preferred Darl to Jewel. From the sections of the other narrators, and especially the one told by Addie, we learn that this is not true at all.

4. Vernon Tull as a Moderate Christian

Vernon Tull also believes in God, but he is not so fanatic, or even obsessed, as his wife. He believes that Cora has the right to be so pious and to trust in God, and he reckons that "if there's ere a man or woman anywhere that He could turn it all over to and go away with His mind at rest, it would be Cora" (46). Vernon also thinks that his wife "would make a few changes, no matter how He was running it" (46) and these changes "would be for man's good" (46). She is thus the ideal Christian, but Vernon's hypothesis that Cora would change God's creation, implies that she even sees herself in a higher position than God himself. Vernon loves his wife and respects her devotion to the Lord, but he also tries to temper her a little since she tends to exaggerate.

5. Addie as Rebellious Sinner

Addie's character could thus not be more opposed to that of Cora. She is aware of her sins and the punishments that follow from them. Cora, however, feels that Addie does not realize how the final judgement really works. It is up to God to decide then what your sins exactly were, and which punishments should follow from these sins. In her section, Addie also refers to the moment when Cora fell on her knees and prayed for her: "One day I was talking to Cora. She prayed for me because she believed I was blind to sin, wanting me to kneel and pray too, because people to whom sin is just a matter of words, to them salvation is just words too" (104). Salvation was however not just a word to Addie. She truly believed that Jewel would be her saviour, and this prediction turns out to be right; he does not let her down.

6. Whitfield the Hypocrite Minister

Addie also differs greatly from the man she had an affair with, Minister Whitfield. While Addie is fully aware of her sin and admits it, Whitfield espouses hypocrisies by keeps on hanging on to his status of untouchable holy man, helper of God despite his affair with Addie that results in the birth of a son, Jewel. In his section succeeding the one by Addie, he

tells that he had to fight with Satan and became the victor. He realizes the seriousness of his sin now and wants to confess it to Anse, but his confession to Anse, takes place only in the mind; there is no actual representation of the scene. Yet, after the imaginary confession, Whitfield states, “It was already as though it were done. My soul felt freer, quieter than it had in years; already I seemed to dwell in abiding peace again” (106). He justifies his actions further by saying, “[God] will accept the will for the deed, Who new that when I framed the words of my confession it was to Anse I spoke them, even though he was not there” (106). Whitfield appears completely comfortable with the notion that God equates good intentions with good deeds.

7. Anse as an Irresponsible Christian

Addie’s husband has a particularly religious side. On the day of Addie’s funeral, he is shown wearing “Sunday pants” (21). This implies that he has at least one pair of nice clothes, perhaps used when he attends church. When the funeral crowd says to him, “The Lord giveth,” he affirms this, repeating, “The Lord giveth” (21). He also makes occasional comments such as, “I done my best. I tried to do as [Addie] would wish it. The Lord will pardon me and excuse the conduct of them He sent me” (64). Another comment reads, “I am the chosen of the Lord, for who He loveth, so doeth He chastiseth. But I be durn if He dont take some curious ways to show it, seems like” (66). This is an allusion to the first part of Hebrews 12.6, which reads, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth . . .” Anse counts himself as one of God’s flock. He also shows his trust in the Lord while at the same time acknowledging the difficulty in understanding His will.

Among Biblical parallels and echoes in *As I Lay Dying*, one concerns some remarks made by Anse:

> I have heard men cuss their luck, and right, for they were sinful men. But I do not say it’s a curse on me, because I have done no wrong to be cussed by. I am

> not religious, I reckon. But peace is in my heart: I know it is. I have done things but neither better nor worse than them that pretend otherlike, and I know that Old Marster will care for me as for ere a sparrow that falls. But is seems hard that a man in his need could be so flouted by a road. (26)

This passage along with its associated verse reveals much about Anse. He recognizes the sinful nature of man, implying that he knows of hypocrites who like to judge him based on their own standards of religion. This is thematically similar to Jesus' words in Matthew 15.7-8: "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias [Isaiah] prophesy of you, saying, 'This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me'". Additionally, Anse professes a belief that God will take care of him, then immediately follows this with hints of weariness, doubt, and impatience. Such emotions are common throughout the Psalms. Despite all his good qualities, Anse is not a perfect character. At times, he seems to espouse a philosophy of self-pity: "I am a luckless man. I have ever been" (15). He also reveals a penchant for selfish motives and insensitivity. Immediately following his wife's death he says, "God's will be done. Now I can get them teeth" (34). The morning after he buries Addie he appears with a new wife, unwilling to look any of his children in the eye.

8. Conclusion

There is a definite Biblical current flowing through *As I Lay Dying*. Though Faulkner uses irony in presenting his undoubtedly "Christian" characters as acutely Pharisaical and creating a somewhat inverted/perverted Christ figure in Jewel Bundren, his overall tone is not one of total irreverence. The Bundrens themselves are not completely without religion. Their patriarch Anse Bundren, though far from perfect shows some belief in a benevolent, omnipotent God and his assurance of a place in Heaven. In these aspects he can be seen as more moral than either Cora Tull or the Reverend Whitfield, who mercilessly flaunt their religiosity.

Lecture Eleven: Albert Camus' Idea of Endurance in *The Myth of Sisyphus* in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*

1. Introduction

Camus' idea of endurance in an absurd world as expressed in his book, *The Myth of Sisyphus,* can aid an understanding of Faulkner's novel, and in particular, greatly strengthen an argument for Cash as the hero of *As I Lay Dying*. Cash alone with his self-denial, self-restraint, integrity, and human dignity, rises above the level of the other family members.

2. The Myth of Sisyphus

According to Camus, "Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing."[50] There are several myths as to why Sisyphus was condemned to torture in the underworld which Camus identifies in his essay—stealing he secrets of the gods, putting Death in chains, and refusing to return to the underworld after Pluto allowed him a brief return to the world of the living in order to chastise his wife. In all three myths the method of torture is the same. Sisyphus is condemned to push a big boulder up the side of a mountain for all eternity. Once the boulder reaches the summit it merely descends to the bottom, and Sisyphus must repeat the process once again.

In the legends of Sisyphus, Camus finds nobility simply in his endurance as a useless passion regardless of his deeds in life, mentioning very little about Sisyphus prior to the Underworld. Camus tells us that we must imagine Sisyphus happy, and the only way we can interpret Sisyphus as a tragic hero is due to the fact that he is conscious. [51] Sisyphus does have

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50. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Beirn (New York: Vintage Books 1955),120.
51. Ibid.,120.

a purpose although that purpose is without meaning. His purpose is to push the boulder up the hill. He reaches the summit time and time again, strives for the heights and according to Camus, he always does this according to his own free will: “All Sisyphus’ silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him”[52] . The absurd hero can be happy apart from circumstance because humanity is always free.

3. Bundren Family as a Failed Version of Sisyphus in *As I Lay Dying*

The application of *The Myth of Sisyphus* is obvious. Even the family name Bundren bears a striking resemblance to the word burden. The Bundren family’s odyssey is akin to the plight of Sisyphus—no more meaningful than pushing a boulder up a mountain. Addie has died. She cannot thank them for their labor. In no way does the ritual of the burial signify anything, at least to the living, because the one who would find meaning in being buried in Jefferson is dead. If the Bundrens sought to give Addie a “proper” burial then they have surely failed. The corpse is badly desecrated by the time they reach Jefferson, and they cannot even bury her without borrowing a shovel. However, as Camus has shown, the absence of purpose does not necessarily negate the presence of heroism. It is responsibility for labor which facilitates heroism.

Anse Bundren is the progenitor of Bundren suffering. Anse seems to be in charge of the family, he is acting as Addie’s puppet who rules him even beyond the grave. The entire motive behind the death march to Jefferson is on account of Addie whose reason for burial, according to Cora Tull, is to escape the Bundrens: “Refusing to let her lie in the same earth with those Bundrens” (17). He is a poor father who suffers from indecisive judgment and unsound egocentric reasoning. It is Anse’s idea to make three bucks thereby missing Addie’s death and delaying the journey long enough so that the flood waters rise which makes fording the river much more difficult than it should have been. And after they endure all of the

52. Ibid., 378.

tragedies of their journey, he forgets to bring a shovel to bury his dead wife. What might easily be inferred by that short sight is that Anse is very selfish. He is really more interested in getting a new set of teeth than burying his wife. When Anse discovers Addie has died he says, "God's will be done," he says. "Now I can get them teeth" (33).

Addie is a selfish and narcissistic mother who sacrifices her aloneness for her family: "my aloneness had been violated over and over each day" (101). She looks at people in terms of function and use. Addie views her children as part of her obscene economy of exchange and payment, as the name Jewel and Cash certainly suggest. Her lack of empathy or compassion is seen in her distaste for her job as a school teacher: "In the afternoon when school was out and the last one had left with his little dirty snuffling nose, instead of going home I would go down the hill to the spring where I could be quiet and hate them" (101). Addie's narration of when Anse proposed to her is accounted as a cold business proposal:

"But you've got a house. They tell me you've got a house and a good farm. And you live there alone, doing for yourself, do you?" He just looked at me, turning the hat in his hands. "A new house," I said. "Are you going to get married?" Furthermore, Addie even viewed her kids as part of this marriage transaction: She [Cora] would tell me what I owed to my children and to Anse and to God. I gave Anse the children. I did not ask for them" (102).

Yet it would be wrong to consider Anse and Addie as the product of Bundren misfortune. Anse's children made their decisions just the same as him, and even some of the children are independently guilty of not taking responsibility for their actions. Dewey Dell has a bad habit of blaming outside factors rather than taking personal responsibility for her actions. Dewey Dell's entire conflict rests in her unwanted pregnancy since her boyfriend, Lafe, is apparently unwilling to marry her and care for the child. Although due to Lafe's irresponsibility, one must recognize ; however, Dewey Dell's pregnancy could have been prevented by her. She decided to engage in intercourse with Lafe for a ludicrous reason.

Dewey Dell wants to have sex with Lafe but not be held responsible for that action or face the consequences of such an action. She wants to be a thing. She wants the external forces of the world to dictate her behavior, so she can say she had no choice in the matter. Dewey Dell trying to disclaim all responsibility for her seduction and her later pregnancy by a strange, perverted, deterministic reasoning process — one that assures her that she will definitely be seduced by Lafe. The plan was that if her cotton sack were full, they would sleep together and if it weren't, it would be a sign from God that she and Lafe shouldn't have sexual intercourse. Lafe manipulatively filled her sack with cotton such that Dewey Dell claims she "could not help it." Now she fears she is pregnant. One motivation for going to Jefferson aside from a desire to bury her dead mother is to find a way to abort her unborn child whether by some type of medicine or procedure.

Jewel and Darl are two ambiguous characters and assessing the quality of their decisions and their willingness to be responsible for their actions is problematic. The issue with Jewel is that we only get one section of his narrative, so the reader is largely disconnected from his motivation. The only fault in terms of responsibility we may infer in Jewel is that he is ashamed that he is a bastard child—the product of a secret affair between the preacher Whitfield and his mother Addie. Somehow Darl discovers this secret and Jewel accordingly wants to kill him. In fact, there are two rational motives for Jewel's desire to have Darl killed. One is that he is angry with Darl for attempting to burn down the barn containing the rotting corpse of his dead mother. After all, such a feat would, perhaps in Jewel's mind, devalue all of the strain and suffering the Bundrens had to endure just to bury Addie in Jefferson. Jewel is the one who saves Addie's body from the burning barn. The second is that he wants the secret of his bastard ancestry concealed for good just as Dewey Dell wants the secret of her unwanted pregnancy concealed for good. Whether or not Jewel is a bastard is existentially irrelevant because Jewel had absolutely no choice in the matter. But this

sensitivity over his illegitimacy motivates him to encourage the officers arresting Darl to kill him.

Darl is the one truly responsible and authentic Bundren; however, I would not term him heroic because he remains a passive observer. One might infer from Darl's lack of contribution to his family's plight that he considers their plight absurd and meaningless. However, he does attempt to burn down Gillespie's barn with his mother and the coffin inside—an ambiguous gesture. It is not clear whether he does that out of respect for his mother or in the selfish interest of ending the absurd journey or burning up their burden in flames.

4. Cash as the Sisyphus of *As I Lay Dying*

Cash is the eldest son of Anse and Addie Bundren. He is referenced several times as a good carpenter, and all in all he seems by far the most level-headed of the Bundrens. Cash just seems to be ill-fated, almost powerless to combat the idiocy of Anse's decisions. Cash broke his leg when he fell off of a church prior in time to when the novel begins. Then, perhaps a month or two later, he breaks that same leg while trying to get the wagon holding the coffin across the river. One of the few specific faults in Cash in terms of his judgment was his willingness to allow concrete to harden over his leg. Cash displays a remarkable willingness to endure. This is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, he can swallow all of this misfortune and none of it seems to burden him. Even after he's broken his leg, he won't even admit that his leg hurts while Peabody strips the concrete off of his leg undoubtedly along with a layer of skin. He endures the pain caused by riding in the wagon with a broken leg without ever voicing the discomfort.

Cash is the hero of the novel, an absurd and tragic hero but a hero nonetheless, and his supreme virtue is his endurance in an absurd and humiliating world. Unlike Anse, Cash's quality of endurance is noble because he is responsible in his suffering. Cash builds Addie's

coffin, gets it across the river at the expense of his leg and endures that torment all the way to Jefferson without voicing any amount of pain or discomfort. Even when Peabody has to strip the concrete cast off his leg and sentence him to a life of hobbling around, Cash endures it well, and he takes total and absolute responsibility for his own actions—never blaming outside factors for his misfortune as Anse does.

5. Conclusion

Cash is Faulkner's neo-classical existential spin-off on the traditional hero type. Cash is the Sisyphean hero type because of his will to endure an ambiguous world. He moves with pride from one burden to another without pause or regret. His fate belongs to him.

Lecture Twelve: Stylistic Devices in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*

1. Introduction

This lecture examines in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying.* These devices include symbols, allusions and time. It shows how the author uses them to reinforce his thematic preoccupations

2. Symbols

Animals Shortly after Addie's death, the Bundren children seize on animals as symbols of their deceased mother. Vardaman declares that his mother is the fish he caught. Darl asserts that Jewel's mother is his horse. Dewey Dell calls the family cow a woman as she mulls over her pregnancy only minutes after she has lost Addie, her only female relative. For very different reasons, the grief-stricken characters seize on animals as emblems of their own situations. Vardaman sees Addie in his fish because, like the fish, she has been transformed to a different state than when she was alive. The cow, swollen with milk, signifies to Dewey Dell the unpleasantness of being stuck with an unwanted burden. Jewel and his horse add a new wrinkle to the use of animals as symbols. To us, based on Darl's word, the horse isa symbol of Jewel's love for his mother. For Jewel, however, the horse, based on his riding of it, apparently symbolizes a hard-won freedom from the Bundren family. That we can draw such different conclusions from the novel's characters makes the horse in many ways representative of the unpredictable and subjective nature of symbols in *As I Lay Dying*.

Addie's coffin comes to stand literally for the enormous burden of dysfunction that Addie's death, and circumstances in general, place on the Bundren family. Cash, always calm and levelheaded, manufactures the coffin with great craft and care, but the absurdities pile up almost immediately—Addie is placed in the coffin upside down, and Vardaman drills holes in her face. Like the Bundrens' lives, the coffin is thrown off balance by Addie's corpse. The

coffin becomes the gathering point for all of the family's dysfunction, and putting it to rest is also crucial to the family's ability to return to some sort of normalcy.

Tools, in the form of Cash's carpentry tools and Anse's farm equipment, become symbols of respectable living and stability thrown into jeopardy by the recklessness of the Bundrens' journey. Cash's tools seem as though they should have significance for Cash alone, but when these tools are scattered by the rushing river and the oncoming log, the whole family, as well as Tull, scrambles to recover them. Anse's farm equipment is barely mentioned, but ends up playing a crucial role in the Bundrens' journey when Anse mortgages the most expensive parts of it to buy a new team of mules. This trade is significant, as the money from Anse's pilfering of Cash's gramophone fund and the sale of Jewel's horse represents the sacrifice of these characters' greatest dreams. But the fact that Anse throws in his farm equipment should not be overlooked, as this equipment guarantees the family's livelihood. In an effort to salvage the burial trip, Anse jeopardizes the very tools the family requires to till its land and survive.

3. Allusions

One tool of Faulkner's craft is intertextuality, his acknowledgement of literary tradition through allusion to previous texts and writers. The title *As I Lay Dying* refers to Book XI of Homer's Odyssey as translated by Sir William Marris. The phrase occurs when Odysseus visits Hades, the underworld, and encounters the shade of Agamemnon, the fallen Greek leader who was the brother-in-law of Helen of Troy. Agamemnon tells how, as he lay dying, the victim of his murderous wife Clytemnestra, she shamelessly turned away from him "and scorned / To draw my eyelids down or close my mouth" (5). The Bundren family repeats the patterns of adultery, betrayal, and revenge set in motion in the Greek legends of the House of Atreus (Agamemnon's father), a cycle of violence that stretched across three generations. Addie speaking from the dead echoes the situation of Agamemnon in Homer's epic. An

American literary source to which Faulkner alludes in his novel is Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter. In Hawthorne's novel, Hester Prynne, like Addie, commits adultery with a man of God and bears a child named Pearl, whose name suggests a preciousness like Jewel's in *As I Lay Dying*. Just as Hester wore the scarlet letter A for adultery as an emblem of her sin, Addie says that she thought of herself and Whitfield as dressed in garments of sin. Dianne C. Luce traces further detailed allusions in *As I Lay Dying* in her volume of annotations to the novel. She explores cases in which characters such as Anse, Cora, and Whitfield hypocritically refer to passages from the Bible, with Anse identifying with Job and Whitfield with Christ. At other times, Addie's monologue "In the early spring it was worst" (100) echoes T. S. Eliot's "April is the cruellest month" from "The Waste Land." Darl refers to an obscene image of "a woman and a pig with two backs and no face" (149), a reference to the "beast with two backs" as a sexual image in act I, scene i of William Shakespeare's Othello. Faulkner incorporates a rich array of allusions in the novel, in both broad and specific ways.

4. Time

As I Lay Dying covers the nine days from Addie's death to the end of the journey over 261 pages. There are two significant deviations: flashback and foreshadowing. Flashbacks are important because the past makes the characters to the persons they are today. Foreshadowing, on the other hand, should especially be noted in relation Darl, whose luck and clairvoyance respectively are important themes in the novels.

All the characters in Faulkner's novel experience the journey at the moment they tell about it; it is present to them. They are thus not able to look into the future and see what will await them during the rest of the trip, except for Darl. He has the special gift of predicting the future. An example of this can be found at the start of the journey when Jewel refuses to join the rest of the family. Anse is very disappointed in Jewel since it is the least he can do for his dead mother. Darl knows however that he will catch up with them: "He'll cut across and meet

us at Tull's lane" (63). On the next page, the reader already knows that Darl's prediction was right: ". . .we hadn't no more than passed Tull's lane when Darl begun to laugh. . . . Yonder," Cash says, jerking his head toward the lane. The horse is still a right smart piece away, coming up at a good pace, but I dont have to be told who it is" (64).

Addie Bundren had also been able to make a prediction about the future. In a conversation with Cora Tull, Addie says, "He [Jewel] is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me" (99). Jewel will always protect her, even after her death. And also this prediction turns out to be right. When the coffin with Addie's corpse in it falls off the wagon into the water, it is Jewel who is able to retrieve it. Later, after Darl lights Gillespie's barn on fire, Jewel surrounded by sparks of fire sacrifices his own body to save Addie's coffin from burning.

Vardaman does not really make a prediction about the future but he warns the reader that something is about to take place: "And I saw something Dewey Dell told me not to tell nobody. It is not about pa and it is not about Cash and it is not about Jewel and it is not about Dewey Dell and it is not about me" (126). The following chapter then starts with Darl's description of how the barn is on fire and Jewel who tries to save everything that is in it, including Addie's corpse.

Darl has no supernatural gift and his can be reduced to a rational explanation: it is just the result of guesswork based on the knowledge he has of the past. He does not foresee a single event that has nothing to do with human will. He figures out, for instance, that Anse will sell Jewel's horse to buy a new team of mules, but he is unable to predict the accident to the wagon that will delay them when delivering the load of wood, the log that strikes the wagon while crossing the river, and, what is most important, his own committal to the mental institution. Another example that shows that Darl's "second sight" (26) is not so supernatural

at all when you look at it more closely can be illustrated in the section in which Darl recounts the moment that Addie dies, while he and Jewel are actually on their way to deliver a load of wood. In this section three parts are printed in italics: the first and the last one show how Darl tells Jewel that their mother is dead; the second one registers a conversation between Dewey Dell and Peabody. This part seems to show that Darl can truly see what is going on inside the house. However, this is not actually true. The presenting of the part in italics and the shifting of the tense from present to future are used to indicate that what Darl is saying does not happen simultaneously with the actual event, but will take place in the future. It is just a guess which in the monologue narrated by Dewey Dell is proven to be accurate. Faulkner himself even gives a clear hint that Darl derives his insight into the behaviour of his parents and siblings from his understanding of them, not from supernatural powers. Darl witnesses his mother crying over a sleeping Jewel after she has found out that her son has worked at night to earn money to buy a horse of his own. Darl realizes, however, that that is not the only reason for Addie's sadness. Jewel's deception resembles her own deception in the form of adultery. Darl seems to understand the obsessive behaviour of his mother and how it is responsible for the contemporary predicament of the family. The present thus continues to be dominated by decisions that were made in the past. Darl seems to understand the obsessive behaviour of his mother and how it is responsible for the contemporary predicament of the family. The present thus continues to be dominated by decisions that were made in the past.

As I Lay Dying appears to be chronological since it starts with Addie lying on her deathbed, followed by her actual death and the journey to take her body to Jefferson. Also each monologue, with the exception of the one told by Addie and the two monologues surrounding hers, by Cora and Minister Whitfield, is a continuation of the previous one in terms of time. These parts of the story belong to the flashbacks, while Addie's death takes place in the Bundrens' present.

Addie's section is one long flashback, talking about her father, her first encounter and marriage with Anse, and the birth of her five children. Also other characters take a closer look at events in the past that had an important influence on their lives now. Dewey Dell for example tells in her first section how she met Lafe and how Darl knew what was going on between them. Darl devotes one of his sections to the summer when Jewel was fifteen, and "took a spell of sleeping" (77). Jewel fell asleep every moment of the day, no matter where he was: on a cow and even in his plate. This section is especially important because of its ending, which shows that Darl knows about the fact that Jewel is not Anse's son, but the result of an affair. A final important memory in *As I Lay Dying* is the one by Whitfield, who just like Addie narrates only a single chapter. He recalls how he wanted to confess his sin to Anse, but he believed that Addie's death was a sign of God to prevent him from telling the truth. He was convinced that God had mercy on him, and so his (and Addie's) sin would remain unspoken forever.

Being not fixed in time, the novel shows important things concerning the past of the protagonists, but also makes references to the future to appeal to the readers' desire to continue reading. Flashbacks and predictions are not only useful to learn more about the characters' personality, but also serve an important purpose in the larger contexts of the novels. Thus, Daryl's clairvoyance is rather ambiguous and stresss Darl's pessimism and fatalism.

5. Conclusion

The examined devices enable to understand the different traits of the characters in the novel. They also enable the author to show brilliant insight into the psychological, economic, and social realities of life in the South in the transition from the Civil War to the modern era through Bundren family.

Lecture Thirteen: The Seven Bundren Narrators and Perspectivism *in As I Lay Dying*

Introduction

William Faulkner has made use of multiple voices and perspective in *As I Lay Dying*. The novel is a series of monologues of fifteen characters. The monologues of some characters are repeated. Seven of the narrators are Bundrens and the other eight narrators are outsiders. The seven narrators from Bundren family are Anse Bundren, Addie Bundren, Cash Bundren, Darl Bundren, Jewel Bundren, Dewey Dell Bundren and Vardaman Bundren.

1. Darl Bundren

In Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Darl Bundren is the main narrator. He is the second son of the deceased Addie Bundren and her husband Anse. Darl, on the other hand, presents a negative image of his mother. They have a very problematic relationship since Addie practically denies Darl's existence. She refused to acknowledge him from the moment he was born: "Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it" (102). Because of the fact that he was not loved by Addie, Darl also rejected her as his mother, "I cannot love my mother because I have no mother" (58). While the other children talk about Addie as "mother," he only refers to and addresses her with her first name "Addie" or even "Addie Bundren." The tensions between these two characters can be found throughout the novel, in Darl's chapters as well as the one that is told by Addie.

As I Lay Dying undoubtedly dealing with a poor family from the country. Faulkner again divides the country people in two large groups, namely the independent and morally upright people and the unscrupulous ones who live by their wits. It is difficult to put Darl Bundren exclusively in one group because of his strange mental condition. He seems to be a mixture of the two groups and embodies the characteristics of two prototypical protagonists. In the course of the novel, we learn that he is very intelligent and eloquent, and that he can

show warm feelings and concern toward his siblings. He is genuinely worried about Cash's health when he breaks his leg and suffers a lot, and he cares for Vardaman as a responsible elder brother should. It is only these two characters that feel sorry for Darl when he is taken away to a mental asylum in Jackson. Darl's relationship with Jewel and Dewey Dell is not so positive. He knows about their secrets, i.e. Dewey Dell is pregnant and Jewel is the result of a brief affair between Addie and Whitfield, and he tortures them with his knowledge. In doing this, he shows how unscrupulous he can be. He does not care about their feelings at all and only thinks of the best way to hurt them. Darl's act of burning the shed in which Addie's coffin is kept can also be considered as rather ambiguous. It can be interpreted as a way to save his mother from further humiliation. The corpse has been above the ground for nine days and because of the horrible smell the Bundrens get a lot of negative comments from the people they meet along the way. Also the fact that the coffin is surrounded by buzzards is very degrading for Addie. His act can also be interpreted as an act of revenge: he has been the unwanted son for far too long and now he wants her to really disappear for once and for all.

An important thing that should be noted in Darl's sections is that he in a sense is the author of the book because of his omniscience and the use of the third person. The section he narrates from page 47 till 52 contains three italicised parts. In these parts he talks about what happens at home while he and Jewel are away and thus is unable to know what actually is going on. The first and third part show conversations between him and Jewel on a distance, but the second one represents what Peabody is saying to Dewey Dell and in this part, Darl refers to himself in the third person. The last section that Darl narrates is even more significant. Here Darl has gone mad and he seems to look at himself from a distance. We get a kind of conversation between Darl the author and Darl the character. " Darl has gone to Jackson. They put him on the train, laughing, down the long car laughing, the heads turning like the heads of owls when he passed. 'What are you laughing at?' I [Darl] said. 'Yes yes yes

yes yes.'" (146). There is about it that unmistakable air of definite and imminent departure that trains have, perhaps due to the fact that Dewey Dell and Vardaman on the seat and Cash on a pallet in the wagon bed are eating bananas from a paper bag. 'Is that why you are laughing, Darl?' Darl is our brother, our brother Darl. Our brother Darl in a cage in Jackson where, his grimed hands lying light in the quiet interstices, looking out he foams" (149).

2. Addie

Addie's chapter consists of almost eight pages. What she reveals is important because it discredits what other characters say. Members of the family and a number of outsiders tell about Addie and the other characters, but their visions are not always very reliable. An example of this is Cora's opinion concerning Darl and Jewel. According to her, Jewel is a real Bundren: "A Bundren through and through, loving nobody, caring for nothing except how to get something with the least amount of work" (17). Darl on the other was "the sweetest thing" (18) she ever saw. Cora believed that "with Jewel [Addie] had just been pretending, but that it was between her and Darl that the understanding and the true love was" (18). Addie's soliloquy starts with some memories about the time she was a school teacher and the hatred she felt toward her pupils. Because of this hatred, she reflects on the words her father used to say: "the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time" (100). He warned her that life would not be easy and Addie admits she hates her father for putting her in this world. She displaces the hatred for the one on whom she was dependent unto the children in the school who are dependent on her. She wants to rebel against her father and she does this by marrying Anse. Addie recounts this in a rather strange way: "And so I took Anse" (100). This is however exactly what she means, she did not wait to fall in love with him. The "took" in the phrase points to the unequal character of their relationship which becomes already clear in their first dialogue.

After referring to the start of her relationship with Anse, Addie turns to telling about the birth of her five children. Her oldest son is called Cash and after his birth she "knew that living was terrible and that this was the answer to it" (101). She thus has a positive feeling about Cash and Cash has the same warm feelings towards his mother. But the positive thoughts and feelings make place for a kind of hatred when Darl is born. Addie refuses to acknowledge the existence of her second son and makes this very clear: "Then I found that I had Darl. At first I would not believe it" (102). She feels as if Anse has tricked her and even experiences the desire that she would like to kill him. He is responsible for the misery that comes over her now. She did not ask for the children, it was Anse who wanted them. Feeling betrayed, she turned to sin by having a secret affair with Whitfield. The child coming from this relationship was named Jewel, and that name immediately shows the value he represents for his mother. Jewel is the only child that is Addie's alone; this son is her own precious "jewel." Jewel also feels very closely connected to his mother. Their love for one another also plays a role concerning the place that was given to Addie's monologue in the novel. Addie tells that Jewel is "[her] cross and he will be [her] salvation. He will save [her] from the water and from the fire." (99) This part comes immediately after the chapter in which Jewel really did save her from the flood. This stresses the love between them: Addie knew that Jewel would do anything for her when she would be in trouble, dead or alive.

About Dewey Dell and Vardaman, Addie is very short: "I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the child I had robbed him of" (104). This implies that Dewey Dell and Vardaman had to grow up without being loved by a mother, just like their older brother Darl.

3. Cash

As I lay Dying contains one chapter that has the form of a list which has to do with the things that interest Cash (82-83) most: craftsmanship and betting. They both have their own

ways of doing what they do best and they share their rules with the readers. Cash Bundren is not an eloquent man and this already becomes clear in his first section in which he explains why he makes his mother's coffin on the bevel. Instead of using full sentences, he applies numbers followed by a couple of words. He does this because he is very obsessed with balance, which is repeated frequently throughout the novel. By stating why the coffin has to be made on the bevel, he tries to avoid imbalance. His work on the coffin is the centre of his world now and the reader already becomes aware of that while reading the previous sections of his siblings. They all comment on the work he is doing and this commentary is not always very positive. Jewel is jealous because Cash is so keen on doing something for their mother and also a little irritated since he is making the coffin right in front of her window, confronting her with her imminent death. The only thing he wants is that his mother can die in some peace and quiet, without having to listen to the noises of the saw and the hammer all the time. Cash's craftsmanship is appreciated very much. This becomes clear when his family shows that they know how important his work and his tools are for him. When everything falls into the water while crossing the river, Jewel and Darl almost risk their lives trying to save Cash's equipment. At this moment in the novel, Cash is lying with a broken leg on the bank of the river. From then on, he is unable to do his work as a carpenter and he has to focus more on his language. Cash is an intelligent and eloquent man who does notice what is going on around him even though he does not always give that impression.

4. Vardaman

Vardaman is the youngest child in the Bundren family and experiences a lot of neglect from both Anse and Addie. Addie gave Vardaman to Anse "to replace the child [she] had robbed him of" (104), but Anse does not pay much attention to his son. Vardaman gets some attention however from Tull, who in this way expresses his own desire to be the father of a son. Deep down, Vardaman is a very confused child that does not seem to understand what is

going on around him. He is rather insecure and looks to those around him for affirmation of what is appropriate behavior. Vardaman is very attached to his family and idolises especially his brothers. That is why he often stresses the relationship between them: “Jewel is my brother. Cash is my brother. Cash has a broken leg. We fixed Cash’s leg so it doesn’t hurt. Cash is my brother. Jewel is my brother too, but he hasn’t got a broken leg” (115). When Darl is taken away to Jackson, Vardaman feels sorry for him and he keeps on repeating that Darl is his brother. He is his brother now and will continue to be his brother, even though he will have to stay in a mental institution for a while: “Darl went to Jackson. Lots of people didn’t go to Jackson. Darl is my brother. My brother is going to Jackson” (147). His confusion becomes especially clear with his obsession with the fish he caught. Even though Addie never loved him, Vardaman sees his mother as a very important person in his life, and this is shown by the fact that he immediately wants to bring his fish to her. She should be the first one to see what he is capable of. But when he is cleaning the fish, he learns that his mother is dead, and from that moment on he starts identifying Addie with the bleeding fish. In his mind, Addie and the fish become one. This identification goes so far that he believes that it is his mother that is “cooked and et” (537) rather than the fish . Yet Vardaman gets confused and he starts panicking because Cash is going to nail the coffin, and he is afraid that Addie will not be able to breathe in there. He recalls the moment when he himself was stuck in the crib. He felt as if he could not breathe because the rat was breathing up all the air. Vardaman wants to spare his own mother this destiny and decides to make some holes in the lid so that she will get some fresh air. He is a little too enthusiastic and two holes reach Addie’s face, so that her face is wounded. Vardaman is not aware of this since he again believes that his mother is a fish, and this feeling will continue throughout the rest of the novel. When the coffin falls into the water on their way to Jefferson, Vardaman knows that his mother will save herself because she can swim away very fast. He does however not want his mother to swim away from him and

depends on Darl for catching her and bringing her back. At first, Darl seems unable to do this and Vardaman is very disappointed: "Where is ma, Darl?" I said. "You never got her. You knew she is a fish but you let her get away. You never got her. Darl. Darl. Darl." (89) Eventually the boys manage to retrieve the coffin from the water, but some moments later Vardaman persists that Addie has escaped through the holes he drilled for her. He cannot believe that his own mother would smell so badly, so he keeps on imagining her as a fish: "My mother is a fish" (61). So Vardaman keeps on saying that his mother is not dead and that she lives on as a fish. So it is only when Jewel does not have his horse anymore that Vardaman understands that they have lost their mother. The fish disappears completely from his mind now and he focuses again on what is real.

5. Dewey Dell

Dewey Dell is represented by her physicality and plain speech, diminishing the importance of her language use. Dewey Dell is frequently described in physical terms and Darl is often the one doing the describing: "She sets the basket into the wagon and climbs in, her leg coming long from her tightening dress: that lever which moves the world; one of that caliper which measures the length and breadth of life" (63). In Dewey Dell's own narrative sections, she frequently focuses on the process of becoming pregnant: "He is a big tub of guts and I am a little tub of guts and if there is not any room for anything else important in a big tub of guts, how can it be room in a little tub of guts" (38). Her primary conflict is physical, in that she carries an unwanted pregnancy. Her use of language is seemingly simplistic and tangible, often using vivid, visceral descriptions that revolve around nature and the physical body.

6. Jewel

In Jewel's one section, Faulkner has Jewel contemplating mute acts of violence. This is a mind that can express itself only through acts of violence and thus Jewel narrates only one

section. Jewel is the only child that is Addie's alone; this son is her own precious "jewel." Jewel also feels very closely connected to his mother. In the only chapter of which he is the narrator, we learn that the only thing he wants for her is some peace and quiet. He hates Cash for hammering the coffin right in front of her and Dewey Dell because she keeps on fanning. Jewel has an intense desire for Addie and this becomes obvious in his oedipal fantasy.

7. Anse

There are only three chapters that are dedicated to the narration of Anse Bundren. Even though this is true, the reader still develops a picture of the way he acts and behaves through how his family members describe him. Anse's sections reveal the hypocrisy of the man and furthermore comically reveal how he has deluded himself into thinking himself sincere. He narrates his sections rather simply and in a chronological order because he is not concerned with anything except that which affects his own person.

Anse Bundren's promise to bury Addie with her family in Jefferson sets the action of the novel in motion. Yet, ironically, Anse's most defining characteristic is a lazy passivity so manipulative that it amounts to an intense passive aggressiveness and so blatant that it is a source of considerable humor in the novel. Darl reports that his father "was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die" (14). Notoriously lazy, Anse is yet a master at getting other people to do for him. Despite his repeated avowals that he "would be beholden to no man" (15),his neighbors constantly help him out. As his neighbor Vernon Tull says, "Like most folks around here, I done holp him so much already I can't quit now" (23). Anse is ridiculous but also malignantly selfish in the way he uses and betrays his family. He takes Jewel's beloved horse and Dewey Dell's money and commits Darl to an insane asylum on the journey to get Addie buried in Jefferson, while he rewards himself with new false teeth and a new wife.

8. Conclusion

By including the voices of several Bundren members, William Faulkner wanted to convey Bundren members' reactions to the death of Addie Bundren. More than conveying different reactions of Bundren children to their mother's death, Faulkner presents the intensity of reaction, the emotionality of reaction, the heightened effect of the tragic fact.

Lecture Fourteen: Nonfamily Narrators and Perspectivism *in As I Lay Dying*

1. Introduction

The outside narrators all function to enlighten some aspects of the Bundren world or to fill in with some factual material. Thus, the outside narrators all present their sections without any degree of complication. Each varies according to the personality of the narrator. The story is told from the eyes of fifteen different narrators, seven are the Bundrens while the other eight are made up of citizens from either the rural land or city. This lecture highlights the decline of the Bundrens from the perspectives of Cora, Macgowan, Peabody and Moseley.

2. Cora Tull: A Narrator from the Same Social Perspective

Cora Tull is only given three chapters of narration but within those chapters she exposes a substantial amount about the Bundrens and their day-to-day lives, both prior to and after the death of Addie. Not only is Cora a close neighbor of the Bundrens, she is also a local farmer's wife, which puts her in the same class as the Bundrens. Like all of the novel's narrators, Cora is used to show distantiation in multiple ways. First, as is not a Burden, Cora has the capacity to recall tragic events that happen to the Bundrens in a more objective manner. Due to her closeness in status, she does not judge the Bundrens based on their country ways; instead she looks at them as individuals. Throughout Cora's sections it appears that her main focus is Addie. During Addie's death scene, Cora begins to relay how she feels about Addie, especially in the realms of faith, religion, and duty. When looking upon the dying matriarch, Cora states, "But the eternal and everlasting salvation and grace is not upon her" (8). As the novel unfolds Cora's concern with the salvation of Addie becomes more apparent. It is Addie's lack of faith and Christian duty that Cora believes is at the heart of the Bundrens' downfall. Cora goes into grave detail on this matter in her final chapter of narration. When Addie literally states that Jewel will be her cross and salvation, saving her from flood and fire,

Cora realizes that Addie means Jewel and not God, and she is horrified that Addie puts her trust in that boy rather than in the Lord.

In this chapter, Addie and Cora discuss the meaning of salvation. When Addie reveals that her son Jewel, who was born out of wedlock, “is [her] cross and he will be [her] salvation”. Cora recalls, “I prayed for that poor blind woman as I had never prayed for me and mine” (99). Through this interpretation of Cora, she is given more agency in comparison to many other readings of her sections.

Having extended Cora’s credibility beyond just the typical religious bigot, it becomes possible to extend her judgments of Addie’s fault. Cora relates Addie’s selfishness, a trait she believes is apparent in all the Bundrens. This inherent selfishness that plagues the Bundrens is essentially what Cora believes contributes to their inability to thrive as a family. She sees this defect in all of the Bundrens with the exception of Darl, the second born son, who, as the novel progresses, and they get closer to the city ends up showing some of his own selfishness. Even though Cora misreads Darl’s personal motives, she still gives insight into the rural view of the Bundrens; she states, “It was Darl, the one that folks say is queer, lazy, pottering about the place” (18). Cora also uses the nature of Darl to illuminate the shortcomings of the rest of the Bundrens. For example, she makes a comment on Darl’s love for his mother; although the reader knows he is not driven by love, but to show the selfishness of the Anse, the father. Cora uses the scene of Anse sending his son away from his dying mother in order to make three dollars as a prime example of the selfishness of the Bundrens .

As Cora misreads Darl’s intentions, the credibility of her statement about Anse is weakened; Faulkner then extends her comparisons to the other Bundrens who are more obviously selfish. Although Cora is critical of all the Bundrens, she tends to devote the majority of her animosity toward Jewel, the middle son, who Addie places all of her sanctimony in. Because of Addie’s decision to place her faith and love in Jewel, rather than

distribute her love equally among the children, or to God, he becomes more susceptible to Cora's criticism. Jewel's decision to leave his mother's deathbed in order to collect three dollars, is to Cora, the ultimate example of his selfishness. Cora makes a series of connections between the selfishness of Jewel and Anse. She believes they both hold the same set of values, or lack thereof, especially when it comes to the death of Addie. When looking at these connections she again takes the role of the "chorus" for the rural people by saying that "nobody that knows Anse could have expected different" (17). She even claims this to be true of two youngest children, Dewey Dell: "'with even that little one almost old enough now to be selfish and stone-hearted like the rest of them'" (17). These vices, in combination with Addie's own selfishness, are what Cora sees as the fatal flaw of the Bundrens. It is because of this character's defects that Cora claims that Addie is "dying alone, hiding her pride and her broken heart. Glad to go" (18). Cora's role as a narrator of the Bundren tale then, is one that is simultaneously objective and subjective, a dichotomy Faulkner manages by having a non-family member who is still emotionally connected to them.

3. The Pharmacist Assistant Macgowan: A Narrator From a City Perspective

MacGowan is the only perspective from the people of the city itself. By the time the novel reaches MacGowan's section the family is in complete turmoil. Addie's corpse is around nine to ten days old, Darl has been betrayed by Dewey Dell and sent to a mental institution in Jackson, and Cash has almost lost his leg due to Anse's cheap "stint" (142) job. When he and the other assistant, Jody, label her as soon as she walks in the door. They describe her as looking, "'pretty good for a country girl'" (142). The fact that they add the "country girl" shows that they are already distancing her from themselves. It is as if to say she wouldn't be as good looking if compared to the girls of the city. MacGowan furthers his distantiation by taking advantage of her by lying about being the doctor. He assumes that since she is a "country girl" she would not be able to distinguish him from a real doctor. Like

Moseley, he also patronizes her while asking what he can do for her. He uses Dewey Dell to generalize people from the country by stating "Half the time they don't know what they want, and the balance of the time they cant tell it to you" (143). After MacGowan discovers what exactly Dewey Dell, he becomes even more corrupt. In short, he uses his social privilege over her to take advantage of her situation.

4. Doctor Peabody: A Narrator from Different Social Perspective

Since he is a doctor, it is obvious that he does not share the same class as the Bundrens. Throughout the novel he is only given two sections, one before the Bundrens begin their journey and one when they are close to finishing it. In these two sections, Peabody shows how he perceives and interprets the Bundrens and their wild antics. In first two lines of narrations, Peabody makes some interesting statements about Addie and Anse. Addie is on her deathbed and when Peabody receives the message to come out he claims that Anse must have, "wore her out at last" (28). By stating this, he adds to the general consensus about Anse's laziness but this time it has come from a social class above Anse rather than from his fellow farmers.

What Peabody does next, however, brings a new element to the story. He contemplates not going out to the Bundrens because he believes there might be something he can do to save Addie. The reason Peabody is hesitant about bringing Addie back to health is not because he hates her, but rather because he thinks she would be better off dead than to go on with the rest of the Bundrens. He calls it having fools ethic in order to let her pass. Now this statement, despite his good intentions, is still an extreme one. It is easy to see how he differs from the way the previous narrators have looked at the Bundrens' situation.

Because Peabody is doctor he is capable of looking at the Bundrens in a different light from the narrators who are not doctors. Although he feels a civic duty because of his occupation, he does not feel the Christian duty of the farmers. This causes him to be another step beyond in the realm of distantiation. Peabody also acknowledges the geographical

distance between himself and the Bundrens. While he is on his way out to the Bundrens' farm he constantly complains about them living on a hill. He also remarks that Anse has not been to town in twelve years. This directly shows how far the Bundrens are removed from society. It is hinting at the fact that if they had been to town more frequently than during their journey, the town and city wouldn't have had such an impact on them.

In Peabody's second section, that takes place toward the end of the novel, he has become even more critical of the Bundrens. He is given the task of trying to repair Cash's leg which has been broken and then set with cement. Once Peabody is presented with Cash in this state he is furious, especially at Anse. The whole chapter is only two pages of dialogue between Cash and Peabody, yet it is here that Peabody reveals his true feelings about Anse. Peabody makes an interesting point when discussing what happened to Cash's leg. Cash claims that, "'It never bothered me much;'" to which Peabody retorts, "'You mean, it never bothered Anse much'" (141). This is one of the few times in the novel where the non-family narrators directly, not via interior monologues, talk to a Bundren about how they see them. Peabody has become so flustered with the actions of Anse that he takes his frustrations out on another Bundren. His animosity rises again when he hears that Anse had to borrow a spade in order to dig the hole. He says to Cash, "'Of course he'd have to borrow a spade to bury his wife with. Unless he could borrow a hole in the ground. Too bad you all didn't put him in it too'" (141). He also tells Cash that the whole Bundren family would be "cured" if they stuck Anse's head in a saw (141). In these last two statements from Peabody, it is apparent that he can no longer tolerate Anse, nor pity the rest of the Bundrens for following him.

5. Moseley: A Narrator from High Social City Social Perspective

Moseley is the first narrator that is introduced that supplies distance from the Bundrens on all levels: he is from the town of Mottson so he is not close to the Bundrens geographically, and as a pharmacist he resides in a higher social class, and until the Bundrens

arrive in Mottson he has never seen nor heard of them before so he has no emotional or intimate ties with them. It is under these three forms of distantiation that Moseley's reactions to the Bundrens can be analyzed. Moseley first interaction with any of the family members is when Dewey Dell comes into his pharmacy. From Moseley's first impression of her, it is clear that he views her as an outsider. When she enters he describes her as a "barefooted…stranger" who was probably looking to buy "a bottle of nigger toilet water" (117). Once Moseley begins to interact with Dewey Dell, he becomes even more suspicious of her. Moseley's account of their interaction brings new elements to how the distantiation creates different perspectives. In his account, Dewey Dell is hardly able to speak. She uses fragmented sentences and answers open-ended questions with a yes or a no. Moseley puts far more distinction on her vernacular than the narrators of previous sections. One example in particular is Moseley quoting her as saying "I'd liefer to go back there" in the place of "I'd like to go back there" (118).

When looking at the difference of vernacular as an intentional distinguishing of voice it is clear to see that Faulkner was trying to create distance between the Bundrens and the people of Mottson. At the beginning of Moseley's interaction with Dewey Dell, he is quite sympathetic. He claims you "have to humor them" because they really don't know any better (178). But once he learns that Dewey Dell has come to see him in order to receive an abortion his demeanor with her quickly changes. He is outraged at the fact that she would even consider him as someone who would perform such an act. Upon her insistency he tells her, "Me, a respectable druggist, that's kept store and raise a family and been a church-member for fifty-six years in this town. I'm a good mind to tell your folks myself, if I just find out who they are" (119). Faulkner accomplishes a few things with this statement from Moseley. First it allows Moseley to show how his status is above Dewey Dell's. His claim to be a "respectable druggist" lets her know that he is respected member of the community and not some backwoods doctor. Secondly he uses his church membership as a moral high ground. Lastly,

he threatens to tell Dewey Dell's parents which jeopardizes her secret as well as makes a statement about the parenting she has received. All three of these factors create distantiation between the two characters. However, after Moseley has convinced Dewey Dell that he will not help her he does show a little bit of compassion. He states before she leaves, "But it's a hard life they [poor people] have" (119). Although this statement shows sympathy, it could also be read as patronizing. As if Moseley has pity for Dewey Dell because of her social class rather than being understanding of her situation.

6. Conclusion

Faulkner creates a spread of nonfamily narrators from rural to urban environments in order to show the decline of the Bundrens; therefore, exposing the reader to several different social perspectives. In order to emphasize the decline of the Bundrens, the reader will be exposed to two different social perspectives: the rural and the urban, and the rich and the poor.

Lecture Fifteen: Rural Modernism and Modernity *in As I Lay Dying*

1. Introduction

In *As I Lay Dying*, the darkly humorous story of the poor white Bundren family's journey from farm to town to bury its matriarch Addie, Faulkner uses the experimental forms associated with modernism to depict the impact of the sociocultural era called modernity, and the processes of urbanization and industrialization known as modernization, on poor whites in the rural South. *As I Lay Dying* makes clear that Faulkner's rural modernism critiques the conflation of the urban and the modern, in part by revealing how the country is used as a foil against which urban modernity is defined. Understanding the novel's engagement with rural life in the modern era exposes the social and aesthetic import of rural obsolescence, and suggests a means of rethinking modernism.

2. Poor White Perennial Obsolescence

As I Lay Dying differs from the other major works in representing characters not in flux but frozen, thus representing neither ascent nor decline, neither progress nor regress, but rather a confluence of forms of stasis, spatial, temporal, and social. Throughout the Bundrens' journey, the passage of time is marked most notably by the advancement of corporeal putrefaction: the potency of the stench from Addie's coffin and the ever increasing number of buzzards; otherwise, frequent obstacles create the feeling that progress is not taking place. This seemingly static expedition fixes the Bundrens within a narrative representative of their social and economic immobility. Perspectivism.and fragmentary narration give textual form to the social stasis of the Bundrens.

As I Lay Dying neither represents the effects the mass migration from farms to factories that, in the first half of the twentieth century, produced significant demographic shifts from rural to urban areas and, in some cases, from South to North on those, like the Bundrens, who

stayed in rural areas and continued to pursue farming. Thus industrialization influences the novel not because Darl and Jewel Bundren leave the farm to take jobs in textile mills or sawmills, a common narrative in the historical and literary record of this period, because these mills represent two of the most important industries in the 1930s South, but rather because they take a job transporting lumber to a mill. The novel illustrates the symbiotic relationship between the country and the city—here it shows that the Bundrens' rural labor (growing cotton and hauling lumber) serves and is shaped by the region's industrial markets (textile and lumber mills). However, it also shows that the features of rural modernization, the employment opportunities, the roads, the access to consumer goods, do not result in any meaningful changes in the Bundrens' socioeconomic experience: their infrequent engagement in paid labor affords them the occasional trifle but does not in any significant way modify their lives.

As I Lay Dying takes up the anti-modern: the rural-dwelling poor white. The Bundrens are not destitute since they own their land, yet they are seen as out of step with the modern. The novel shows this representation of poor white experience to be based in part on rural poor whites' old-fashioned practices and possessions but also on the perception of the commentator. This poor white obsolescence is a matter both of reality and of perception, for the family members and their possessions seem to metamorphose as they move from being described by poor rural spectators to being depicted by more affluent urban ones. For example, the Bundrens' wagon, seen by Darl as merely "shabby" (92), is to town dweller Moseley "ramshackle" (120). More dramatically, Addie's well-made coffin, admired in Frenchman's Bend as an example of Cash's skill in carpentry and hailed by farmer Vernon Tull as "tight as a drum and neat as a sewing basket" (54), becomes to its town chronicler "that home-made box" (120): one in a catalog of unfit objects that make the Bundrens' entrance into town comparable to "a piece of rotten cheese coming into an ant-hill" (120).

These descriptions also extend to the Bundrens themselves; Dewey Dell experiences time as moving very rapidly—events occur "too soon" (72) for her to handle them all , while Moseley associates her with an excess of slow-moving time. In each case, the urban gaze regards rural poor whites inherently and unvaryingly archaic, that is, obsolete. The townspeople establish their urban, modern identities in the narrative through their descriptions of the Bundrens, and the signs of obsolescence on which they focus are chosen as foils for their own desired self-presentations. Thus, the ramshackle wagon, homemade coffin, and slow moving time establish an implicit contrast with a significant set of opposites: the automobile, the mass-produced product, and fast-paced modern city life establishing a establish a claim of radical and irrefutable cultural superiority.

The Bundrens challenge these urban stereotypes of country people, articulating forms of self-definition that rebel against the dismissive urban categorization of rural poor whites as a singular and inferior whole. Darl considers his ambiguous economic and ontological position as a middle man in a lumber transaction by contemplating his relationship to the timber: "the load that is no longer theirs that felled and sawed it nor yet theirs that bought it and which is not ours either, He on our wagon though it does" (50). Here Darl's efforts toward self-definition are part and parcel of his conception of his socioeconomic status, because he links his place in the economic order—lacking the ability to buy or sell goods and instead equipped only with his labor-as-commodity, he takes piecemeal work as a conduit for others' goods—to the fundamental ontological questions by which he is troubled. The ambiguity of Darl's relationship to the lumber—he is the present .non-owner, contrasted with the past owner and the future owner—is related to and, indeed, to some extent constitutive of his crisis of being, reflected in his lament, "I dont know what I am. I dont know if I am or not" (49). Darl's inability to identify "what" he is, catalyzed by his in-between position in the economic exchange, devolves into questioning "if" he is. These ontological ponderings,

musings on is and was, is and is-not, represent Darl's struggle to be self-defining and the challenge posed by that effort because of his status as a rural poor white.

3. The Sweat Economy

In *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner uses sweat as a means to identify and measure the labor that is masked within the dominant economic order. By way of sweat, these works enter into dialogue with proletarianism and agrarianism. Despite their ideological differences, proletarian literature is a progressive, worker-centered genre, while the Twelve Southerners' conservative Agrarianism serves bourgeois interests, both can be seen, to varying degrees, as propagandistic and reductively sociological. In going against the precepts of proletarian fiction, Faulkner crafts a more enduring portrait of the real conflicts of works because he eschews offering answers for ephemeral problems and instead and engages in a more lasting interrogation of society and history. For example, such 1930s proletarian works of fellow Southerner Erskine Caldwell as *Tobacco Road (*1932) and *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937) identify the sharecropping system as the cause of the economic hardship and attendant sufferings of poor Southerners and advocate government intervention and tenant activism to transform the agricultural order. However, the sharp decline in sharecropping that began in the late thirties, catalyzed by New Deal agricultural programs and modernized farming methods, did not improve the lives of poor sharecroppers; instead, it simply transplanted them into similarly exploitative wage labor on farms or in factories.

Faulkner also critiques the Vanderbilt Agrarians and their 1930 manifesto. *The Twelve Southerners* distinguish conservative Southern agrarianism from progressive Northern (or American) industrialism. Unlike the industrial order, relentlessly addicted "to work and to gross material prosperity," Southern agrarianism is characterized in *I'll Take My Stand* as a

system defined by leisure"[53]. John Crowe Ransom explains that the Southerner "envelop [ed] both his work and his play with a leisure which permitted the activity of intelligence" [54] and boldly writes of the antebellum era that "labor itself was leisurely"[55]. Frank Lawrence Owsley concurs in his description of antebellum life: "The life of the South was leisurely and unhurried for the planter, the yeoman, or the landless tenant. It was a way of life, not a routine of planting and reaping merely for gain" [56]. If antebellum life was "leisurely and unhurried" for the planter and the yeoman of whom Owsley writes, it certainly was not for their slaves. In fact, the landless white tenant as forced to eke out a living on the fringe of the plantocracy, often by doing the plantation's dirty work as an overseer or patroller. The Agrarians' South is, as Faulkner suggests, a "make believe region."

Faulkner's As *I Lay Dying* counters this unrealistic and paradoxical representation of leisurely labor by creating what I term a "sweat economy": a system for recognizing the work that inheres in objects in order to stave off the dissociation of the laborer from the fruits of his or her labor. Several characters in *As I Lay Dying* use sweat as a measure of labor. Farmer Vernon Tull describes looking at "the broad land and my house sweated outen it" (83) and Anse Bundren, father of the Bundren clan, offers a sustained reflection on the sweat economy vis-à-vis the country/town divide: "It's a hard country on man; it's hard. Eight miles of the sweat of his body washed up outen the Lord's earth Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hardworking man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats" (66). Agriculture in Faulkner's oeuvre is an exploitative regime that benefits the few through the sweat of the many.

53.Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1930), 12.
54.Ibid.
55. Ibid., 14.
56. Ibid., 71.

At the end of Cash's penultimate chapter, he uses sweat to condemn his brother Darl for burning their neighbor Gillespie's barn: "there just aint nothing justifies the deliberate destruction of what a man has built with his own sweat and stored the fruit of his sweat into" (140). Here again, sweat is used to show the labor value of objects Cash uses the idea of sweat to reckon the magnitude of Gillespie's loss, figuring the barn and its contents not in terms of dollars and cents but as extensions of Gillespie: as "the fruit of his sweat." Cash's perspective is neither as a commodifying vision nor an illustration of his "materialism": sweat imbues objects with value as private property (20). According to Marx, though, private property results from alienated labor, and Cash's aim in taking recourse to the sweat economy is to show that Gillespie, far from estranged from the products of his labor, is embodied in them. In fact, Gillespie's barn and its contents are, within a Marxist paradigm, use-values, objects produced by Gillespie to satisfy his own wants, rather than commodities, because they are not intended for exchange. The sweat economy is rather a "timeless" form for identifying the traces of labor in the physical world. Faulkner's sweat economy counters a "make believe" vision of the South that was deployed by conservative movements whose interests were served by its evocation of a system defined by "leisurely labor."

4. Conclusion

As *I Lay Dying*, explores rural white poverty. Rural modernism, this socio-politically significant aesthetic form, facilitates a rethinking of literary modernism on several fronts. First, the sweat economy triptych makes clear, attention to the symbiotic relationship between rural content and innovative form suggests new approaches to and links between Faulkner's works. Second, recognizing rural modernism brings Faulkner's works further into the fold of modernism writ large by explicating the ways in which ostensibly un- or even anti-modern textual elements, slow-moving wagons and sweating farmers, work in the service of the modern

Lecture Sixteen: Addie Bundren the Disobedient Mother *in As I Lay Dying*

1. Introduction

Addie Bundren in *As I Lay Dying* is one of Faulkner's most intriguing women characters because she is one of the few who tells her own story, in her own voice. In her monologue, Addie recounts her struggle to find the meaning of life and a sense of self in a culture she finds oppressive and "dead." This struggle takes the form of an angry rebellion against her society, marriage, and religion, as well as the language that defines and circumscribes them, a rebellion that Addie accomplishes by grounding her identity in her body.

2. Addie's Body as a Means to Rebel against her Society

Addie Bundren uses her body to rebel against her society, establishing meaning through the physical pains and pleasures of her nurturing motherhood and selfish sexuality. She embraces her roles as mother and as sinning adulteress and she manipulates and distorts those roles and their meanings to expose her society's empty constructions of motherhood, love, religion, and language, creating a sense of self and negotiating power for herself separate from them.

By forming her identity through her body, both as mother and as adulteress, she conforms to cultural gender constructions, without allowing her rebellion to be visible. It is through passionate physical connections to other people that she feels feel alive and connected to her body. Through these connections, Addie constructs a feminine notion of being that counters the masculine reason for being posited by her father, who said, "The reason for living is to stay dead a long time" (100). In rejecting her father's credo, she is, likewise, rejecting the Christian notion that one suffers during one's secular life for the promise of a better life in the afterworld; instead, Addie searches for passion and feeling in this world

which Addie calls “the duty to the alive” (103). For Addie, existence is only meaningful if it is experienced physically, not only in pleasure but also in pain.

In the beginning or her monologue, Addie speaks or her hatred and bitterness because she feels disconnected and so insignificant to those around her. As a schoolteacher, she beats the children to feel and see their blood, so they will feel and know her physically, thus validating her own existence. She thus violently forces a merging of self and other “! Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever” (261). Addie also feels alienated from her own primal, natural self, hating her father for “having ever planted” her (100). Articulating her decision to marry, “and so I took Anse” (100), Addie conceptualizes her marriage as a primarily physical experience, yet when she marries, she feels further disconnected from herself and the feeling of being alive.

Her aloneness does become violated, however, when she has her first child, when motherhood and nursing make her feel connected to another being and her own body. She then experiences the collapse between self and others : “I would think that if he were to wake and cry, I would suckle him, too... . My aloneness had been violated and then made whole again by the violation ...” (172). It is as if her sense of personal wholeness is disrupted by the primal connection of nursing, but the physical intrusion by another is what enables her to experience an integrated sense of self. In this way, she nurtures her motherhood, using it to fulfill her own need for wholeness within the construction of nurturing and selfless maternity.

Addie not only distorts the notion of maternal nurturing, but she also manipulates the notion of mother as commodity. In rejecting Anse, by figuratively killing him, Addie denies him the use value of her maternity. Her motherhood can then belong to her only; her children satisfy her personal needs rather than serve her husband’s or society’s interests. By appropriating two of her children for herself, Addie denies Anse his paternal rights. Yet, by stating, “I gave Anse Dewey Dell to negative Jewel. Then I gave him Vardaman to replace the

child I had robbed him of. And now he had three children that are his and not mine" (101), Addie actively participates in patriarchal human commodity exchange.

Addie not only finds purpose and passion through motherhood but also illicit sexuality, embracing the notion of herself as adulteress and accepting it as sin. She relishes her affair with the minister precisely because he "was the instrument ordained by God ... to sanctify that sin He had created" (103). Yet, though she accepts the notion of sin and herself as adulteress, she finds psychological power within her sin. She says her sin was the "garments which we would remove in order to shape and coerce the terrible blood to the forlorn echo of the dead word high in the air" (103). Thus, Addie devises her own meanings of sin and morality, reappropriating the language and values of her culture.

Her illicit liaison with her lover Whitfield shows her synthesis of her sexuality and her maternity, figuring her baby Jesus. Jewel becomes Addie's "cross" and her "salvation" (168), saving her from the flood and fire.. The Christ figure is born not from the Virgin Mother but from the sexual mother. In this way, through Jewel, Addie is also able to subdue her "terrible blood" (103), her desire for pain, in herself and others. Addie not only suckles Jewel but mourns and weeps for him as well, for when Addie realizes that by purchasing a horse, Jewel has deceived her, he "was sleeping in the dark. She cried hard" (268). Thus, Addie expresses her maternity through milk and tears, yet she is not crying over her son's corpse but over his replacement of her with a horse, a selfish mourning.

3. Addie's Manipulative Language

Addie's telling of her life involves a critique of language and a deconstruction of verbal meaning at the same time that Addie manipulates and reclaims language to make sense of her life. In this way, Addie's maternity and her sexuality act as creative forces, for not only does she bring meaning to her life through them but she grounds her telling in the experiences of her body, through the milk-flow and the blood-flow, thus bringing meaning to the "dead"

words and “empty” language she hears around her. Addie, then, does not reject language but seeks to correspond action and feeling (doing with words):

> I would think how words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and how terribly doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle from one to the other; and that sin and love and fear are just sounds that people who never sinned nor loved nor feared have for what they never had and cannot have until they forget the words. (102)

Addie comes to this understanding of language through her experience of primal connection and instinctive bonding .

In her experiences of motherhood, Addie feels that “words are no good” (101), as they are just “a shape to fill a lack” (102). With Cash and Jewel, she does not need to speak of motherhood and love, for, she says, “words dont ever fit even what they are trying to say at. When [Cash] was born I knew that motherhood was invented by someone who had to have a word for it because the ones that had the children didn’t care whether there was words for it or not” (101). In this way, words are “are meaningless without the ‘doing’ or the feeling. Addie is described as using ‘voiceless speech’” (103) to communicate to her family. She uses her eyes to touch them, “not with sight or sense, but like the stream of a hose touches you” (29), as she connects most powerfully through fluid emotion.

Yet, Addie Manipulates language to negotiate power within a culture she finds stifling and dead. She embraces language but shapes and coerces empty words to fit her own passion and meaning. In this way, Addie inverts word “sin” so that it takes on a positive and creative meaning. Words such as “terrible” and “violation” also become Addie’s consciousness, as they signify passion, power, and feeling. However, by changing the culturally established meanings of words, inversion becomes “a model of deception”Addie hates deception above

all else, and, as Darl says, “tried to teach us that deceit was such that, in a world where it was, nothing so bad or very important” (78). Thus, she cries, when she realizes that Jewel, by running off nights to buy the horse that displaces her, was deceiving her, and when she realizes that by keeping his paternity secret and by manipulating language, she has been deceiving him. But Addie hates not only deception but separations and boundaries that construct patriarchal culture threatening the merging between self and other that she seeks.

Addie says, “We had to use one another by words like spiders dangling by their mouths from a beam, swinging and twisting and never touching” (101), describing how words alienate people from each other. But they do so only when they lack the action and feeling to make them meaningful, only when they deceive. Addie distinguishes between the “dark voicelessness in which the words are the deeds” (103) and “the other words that are not deeds, just the gaps in people’s lacks” (103). Addie does use language to signify physical and emotional connections, as when she calls for Cash at deathbed: “‘You, Cash,’ she shouts, her voice harsh, strong unimpaired. ‘You Cash!’” (31). Addie therefore does not deny symbolic, paternal order but rebels by establishing her own meaning within it.

Likewise, in wanting to be buried with her father in town is her most visible and outrageous rebellion, for, as Cora exclaims, “a woman’s place is with her husband and children, alive or dead” (18). And by forcing her family on a journey in which, faced with her rotting, smelling body for days, each member must take account of her body and their relationship to it, Addie makes her final mark and most significant difference in life. Her death requires each of her children to enter into and find a place for himself or herself in culture. Yet while each of Addie’s sons must find a masculine identity for himself, her only daughter, Dewey Dell, repeats Addie’s struggle into womanhood. Through her pregnancy, Dewey Dell is thrown back into the semiotic bond, the instinctual drive that reconnects her to her mother upon her mother’s death. Dewey Dell must come to terms with her own body, her

sexuality, and her maternity so that her mother's death coincides with her emergence into womanhood, disconnecting her from her child-self and forcing her to negotiate her way in the world: "When mother died, I had to go beyond and outside of me" (38).

4. Dewey Dell, Completion of the Mother's Revenge against Patriarchal Culture

Like Addie, however, she relates to the world physically, through touch rather than words. She grieves for Addie and her grief made more potent by the fact that her mother dies as Dewey Dell's own body is changing with the onset of motherhood, which, since she is not prepared for it, becomes "the agony and the despair of spreading bones" (72). She is also uncomfortable and self-conscious about her soon-to-be obvious sexuality, as she imagines Darl undressing her with his eyes, noticing he unvirgin state.

Although, unlike Addie, her sexuality and motherhood make her feel disconnected and, like Addie, she struggles to find a sense of herself through bodily connections with others. She conceives her maternity and her "unvirginness" in purely physical terms. Pregnancy is the intermingling of her insides with her lover's insides: "And I am Lafe's guts" (39). Yet, she imagines a connection with the father of her baby that Addie never felt, and so she does not claim full possession of her child. Thus, the pregnancy is an intruding "tub of guts" (38) rather than the creative, self-affirming force it is for Addie. This maternal merging of self and other is terrifying to Dewey Dell, and to protect herself, she presses into the maternal figure of the cow, thinking, "I feel my body, my bones and flesh beginning to part and open upon the alone and the process of becoming unalone is terrible" (39).

For Dewey Dell, that plunge is the "dead" world around her, "the dead air [that] shapes the dead earth in the dead darkness" (41). Just as she uses her mother's word, "dead," to describe the world, she also appropriates her mother's words, "terrible" and "unalone" to describe primal connection. Yet, at the same time, Dewey Dell communicates without language, expressing her desire for help and connections with looks, either at the doctor,

Peabody, or at Darl. And, like Addie, she does not trust words, believing Darl because he speaks to her without language: "He said he knew without the words like he told me that ma is going to die without words." (20). But while Addie is powerful in her silence, Dewey Dell suffers, not able to communicate to the people who could help her believed that "he had been there and saw us" (20). But while Addie is powerful in her silence, Dewey Dell suffers, not able to communicate to the people who could help her.

While Addie finds power in motherhood and sexuality, Dewey Dell feels isolated and disconnected. She, unlike Addie, is not able to meld her sexuality and her motherhood together, for she cannot resolve the notion that she is pregnant by the man she desires. Indeed, while Addie nurtures her illicit motherhood, Dewey Dell wants to abort her pregnancy, so that she would "be all right alone" (38). While Addie is aggressive in her sexuality, Dewey Dell passively submits. She feels the power coming from her passions and her body, yet feels trapped within her femininity, lost like "a wet seed wild in the hot blind earth" (41).

Dewey Dell does, however, complete Addie's revenge against patriarchal culture, becoming, along with Jewel, "the chosen avatars of maternal fury" (300). Her attack on Darl avenges both the desecration of Addie's body and the silent torments and taunts he has inflicted on Dewey Dell. The novel ends with Dewey Dell, her abortion denied, sitting atop the family's wagon, eating bananas, emerging as the representation of maternal culture. Thus, Addie's body persists as the most vivid and powerful presence in the novel.

5. Conclusion

Addie remains such a powerful character for feminists because she challenges patriarchal culture by redefining, refiguring, and playing with everything that culture has given her, including language, religion, and, of course, her body. She bequeaths some of her traits to her daughter to complete the mother's revenge.

Lecture Seventeen: Postmodernism and its Tenets

1. Introduction

This lecture provides us with definitions of postmodernism and its inherent characteristics. These characteristics will be examined in the works of postmodernist writers.

2. Definition

Postmodernism is a complicated term, or set of ideas, one that has only emerged as an area of academic study since the mid-1980s. Postmodernism is hard to define, because it is a concept that appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study, including art, architecture, music, film, literature, sociology, communications, fashion, and technology.

3. Modernism and Postmodernism

Postmodernism follows most of the modernist ideas, rejecting boundaries between high and low forms of art, rejecting rigid genre distinctions, fragmentation and discontinuity emphasizing pastiche, parody, bricolage, irony, and playfulness. But postmodernism differs from modernism in its attitude toward a lot of these trends. Modernism tends to present a fragmented view of history as something tragic and works of art can provide the unity, coherence, and meaning which have been lost in most of modern life. Postmodernism, in contrast, does not lament the idea of fragmentation, provisionality, or incoherence, but rather celebrates that.

4. Postmodernism as a Cultural Formations of Capitalism

Another way of looking at the relation between modernism and postmodernism helps to clarify some of these distinctions. According to Frederic Jameson, modernism and postmodernism are cultural formations which accompany particular stages of capitalism. He outlines three primary phases of capitalism which dictate particular cultural practices. The first is market capitalism, which occurred in the eighteenth through the late nineteenth centuries in Western Europe, England, and the United States (and all their spheres of

influence). This first phase is associated with particular technological developments, namely, the steam-driven motor, and with a particular kind of aesthetics, namely, realism. The second phase occurred from the late nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century (about WWII). This phase, monopoly capitalism, is associated with electric and internal combustion motors, and with modernism. The third, the phase we are in now, is multinational or consumer capitalism (with the emphasis placed on marketing, selling, and consuming commodities, not on producing them), associated with nuclear and electronic technologies, and correlated with postmodernism.

5. Postmodernity and Modernity

Another facet, or definition, of postmodernism comes more from history and sociology than from literature or art history. This approach defines postmodernism as the name of an entire social formation, or set of social / historical attitudes; more precisely, this approach contrasts "postmodernity" with "modernity," rather than "postmodernism" with "modernism." The label "modern," first articulated in nineteenth-century sociology, was meant to distinguish the present era the Middle Ages and Antiquity. The modern started with the Renaissance. Modernity is fundamentally about order: about rationality and rationalization, creating order out of chaos. The assumption is that creating more rationality is conducive to creating more order, and that the more ordered a society is, the better it will function. In western culture, this disorder becomes "the other" defined in relation to other binary oppositions. Thus anything non-white, non-male and rational becomes part of "disorder," and has to be eliminated from the ordered, rational modern society.

Totality, and stability, and order, Lyotard argues, are maintained in modern societies through the means of "grand narratives" or "master narratives," which are stories a culture tells itself about its practices and beliefs. Postmodernism then is the critique of grand narratives, the awareness that such narratives serve to mask the contradictions and instabilities

that are inherent in any social organization or practice. In other words, every attempt to create "order" always demands the creation of an equal amount of "disorder." Postmodernism, in rejecting grand narratives, favors "mini-narratives," stories that explain small practices, local events, rather than large-scale universal or global concepts. Postmodern "mini-narratives" are always situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no claim to universality, truth, reason, or stability.

6. Key Concepts of Postmodernism

a- Death of the Grand Narratives: Any theory or intellectual system which attempts to provide a comprehensive explanation of human experience and knowledge. Religion, science, Freudian psychology and political ideologies such as Marxism, nationalism and neoliberalism all produce competing grand narratives (also referred to as master narratives and metanarratives). Grand narratives are particularly associated with Enlightenment and modernist thinking in that they are organized around the 'story' of human progress and perfectibility. Postmodern thinkers, most prominently Jean- François Lyotard, have pointed to what they see as the dangers inherent in such "totalizing" visions of history. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979) Lyotard contends that blind faith placed in the singular intolerance of difference. This intolerance led directly to the horrors of the 20th c. Instead, Lyotard argues, we should embrace a multiplicity of theoretical viewpoints in order to appreciate the heterogeneity of human experience, and employ *petits récits*, "little narratives", to enable a better comprehension of and ability to respond to, local, contingent and temporary circumstances.

b- Metafiction: Any work of fiction which seems preoccupied by its own fictionality or with the nature of fiction generally. Metafiction differs from realist fiction, which employs all kinds of techniques – linear narrative, cause and effect, detailed description, rich characters and dialogue – to encourage readers to feel that what they are reading corresponds with

reality. Metafiction, by contrast, obliges its readers to consider first and foremost its own artifice; it disrupts the illusion that fiction gives direct access to the real world. Common techniques include beginnings and endings which comment on the nature of beginnings and endings; the appearance of the author as a character (who may well discuss the process of writing the narrative); and the realization by characters that they are merely characters.

c- Intertextuality:

A term denotes the interdependence of literary texts, the interdependence of any one literary text with all those that have gone before it. A literary text is not an isolated phenomenon but is made up of a mosaic of quotations, and that any text is the absorption and transformation of another.

d- Hybridity: A hybrid is a thing that is a mixture of other things. Postmodern texts are often hybrids of genre, taste and style. For A text uses different genres and styles within the same book: biography, dictionary, fiction, pastiche and even an examination paper.

e- Fragmentarism: The traditional realist novel uses the convention of a linear narrative. That is to say a sequence of events in a logical sequence, starting at the beginning, following a chronological train of events and finishing at the end. Postmodernist novels, however, are not constrained by such conventions. Narrative events can occur arbitrarily at any point in the sequence.

f- The Death of the Author:

In *The Death of the Author*, an essay first published in 1968, Roland Barthes attacks the common and traditional view of the author as the ultimate explanation of a work. Barthes (and poststructuralist theory) contends that the author can no longer be regarded as the omniscient and all-pervading presence and influence in a work of literature; indeed, he implies that the reader takes over as the prime source of power in a text. At the end of the essay Barthes suggests that "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author". The

author becomes little more than a hypothesis, a person projected by the critic from the text, and a convenient catch-all for the critic, whereas the reader is at liberty to see the plurality of the text.

7. Conclusion

Postmodernism favors the use of these tenets discussed in this chapter to remind the reader of the fictionality of the text. These tenets also serve to question the validity of modern beliefs, particularly the question of the existence of truth.

Lecture Eighteen: Robert Lowell's Postmodern Confessional Poetry

1. Introduction

The lecture shows how Lowell founded Confessional Poetry. As a postmodern poet, Lowell adopted the modernist concern with ugly industrialized urban environment.

2. Robert Lowell as the Founder of Confessional Poetry:

Born in 1917 into an aristocratic Boston family, Robert Lowell was not yet thirty when his first major collection of poems, *Lord Weary's Castle*, won the Pulitzer Prize. With *Life Studies*, his third book, he found the intense, highly personal voice that made him the foremost American poet of his generation.

With the publication of Life Studies in 1959, Robert Lowell pioneered a new style in American poetry that M.L. Rosenthal labeled "confessional." In this new style, the poet represents his private psychological problems and makes them an embodiment of his civilization. The Confessional poems which are highly emotional, autobiographical and narrative are presented in the first-person voice with little apparent distance between the speaker and the poet.

Lowell's protests against the Second World War and the Vietnam War contributed to the rise of Confessional poetry. During the Second World War, he was imprisoned for being a conscientious objector. He also protested against the war in Vietnam. In 1967, Robert Lowell took part with prominent intellectuals in a march on the Pentagon to protest the Vietnam War. In 1965, Lowell had written a letter to Lyndon Johnson declining an invitation to be part of a gathering of artists at the White House. In the letter, he expressed his disillusionment with the President's and his administration's war policies and lamented that he "could only follow [their] present foreign policy with the greatest dismay and distrust." [57]

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57. Robert Lowell, quoted in Leonard Unger, *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies* (New York: Scribner, 1974), 18.

3. Lowell's Confessional Poetry: Urbanization of Poetry

Lowell learns from the modernistS how to incorporate imperfection and ugliness into poetry. Lowell's poetry contains many images that imply ugliness as an objective correlative for modern man's frail faith.

"Skunk Hour" is about America's religious, historical, economic, sexual and moral predicaments. The poem is peopled by three characters: weird "hermit / heiress," the ambiguous "summer millionaire," and "the impostor." [58] They all suffer from the same spiritual emptiness as the inhabitants of Eliot's poem. The words "hermit / heiress" used to describe the old woman suggest wealth and seclusion stressing that wealth leads only to alienation. As an illustration between wealth and alienation is the unused land that she bought to find refuge in. The millionaire represents a real possibility of economic thriving, yet his death has directed the village to poverty. The imposter "who'd rather marry" for wealth as he earns no money himself incarnates the departure from moral values and practices. To represent this sterility of modern culture, Lowell presents the image of stinky and disgusting skunks searching for food in the trash which is reminiscent of Eliot's rat. In this morally bankrupt society, Lowell finds value only in an animal associated with garbage and noxious odor:

> a mother skunk with her column of kittens swills the garbage pail.
>
> She jabs her wedge-head into a cup
>
> of sour cream, drops her ostrich tail,
>
> and will not scare.[59]

Though the poem is peopled by many characters like the heiress, the millionaire, and the impostor, Lowell finds value only in an animal associated with "garbage". Charles Altieri sums up the symbolic significance of the skunks: "As the skunk makes her way beneath the

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58. Robert Lowell, *The Achievement of Robert Lowell: A Comprehensive Selection of His Poems with a Critical Introduction* (Illinois: Scott Foresman, 1966), 71.
59. Ibid.

‘chalk-dry church spire’ reminding the reader of the dead vertical world, she embodies whatever possibilities Lowell can find for restoring a context of value within secular and biological necessity.” [60]

In addition to this image of the animal, Lowell employs the images of the car and bones to support the poet’s uncomfortable feeling with the vulgar love scene that he witnesses. The scene that depicts the two lovers making love in the car near in the graveyard near the “hill’s skull” is an indication of the decline in human values. Their love is only physical and has no spiritual meaning.

In addition to this image of the animal, Lowell employs the images of the car and bones which are common to Eliot’s poetry to support the poet’s uncomfortable feeling with the vulgar love scene that he witnesses:

> One dark night,
> my Tudor Ford climbed the hill’s skull;
> I watched for love-cars. Lights turned down,
> they lay together, hull to hull,
> where the graveyard shelves on the town. . . .
> My mind’s not right.[61]

The scene that depicts the two lovers make love in the graveyard near the "hill’s skull" is an indication of the decline in human values. Being in the car with its mechanical connotation and lying together “hull to hull” is reminiscent of the behaviour of the clerk and the typist in their love which is only physical and has no spiritual meaning.

4. Conclusion

Despite Tomlinson’s different experiences, his poetry incorporates Eliot’s urbanization of poetry as a necessary replacement for the romantic Idealization of nature

60. Charles Altieri, quoted in Beach, *The Cambridge Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, 158.
61. Ibid.

Lecture Nineteen: Lowell's Confessional Poetry as a Christian Impersonal Personal Aesthetics

1. Introduction

The lecture examines how Lowell turned to Eliot to develop a viable modern Christian poetics that might constitute a cure for modern illness. However as a confessional poet, his use of autobiographical self and memory represents a departure from the Eliotian impersonal aesthetics.

2. Lowell's Confessional Poetry: From Secularism Toward Eliotic Christian Aesthetics

In Lowell's poetry, there is the same Eliotian awareness of the fallen world and the urgent need for salvation. Many Lowell's poems manifest the worst effects of the fall: "the waste / Of the great garden rotten to its roots." [62] In "The Dead in Europe," he laments "0 Mary, marry earth, sea, air, and fire; / our sacred earth in our day is our curse." [63]

Though he traces the chaos of modern world back to religious reasons, he at first does not offer redemption in the Christian sense as the only possible way to restore order. Because of the secular nature of his society and his doubt about the relevance of Christianity to the modem world, he tries out art as a substitute for religion to redeem the modern world. In "The Bomber," Lowell uses religious images to depict the violent modern warfare. Death caused by blasting by the Bomber is juxtaposed with Christ sacrificing his life. The bomber causes "the bloody sweat" [64]from Christ's brow and his crucifixion on the cross. However, in the violent modern warfare, there is no promise of redemption and "Christ gave up the ghost." [65]

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62. Robert Lowell, *The Achievement* , 29.
63. Ibid., 49.

64. Robert Lowell, *Collected Poems*, eds. Frank Bidart and David Gewanter (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 871.
65. Ibid., 871.

In “Beyond the Alps,” the opening poem of *Life Studies*, he, against his will, replaces Rome the “City of God” by Paris the city of art as Christianity is irrelevant to a modern secular world: “Life changed to landscape. Much against my will / I left the City of God where it belongs.” [66] His abandonment of Roman Catholicism and breaking up with religion is provoked by the abuses of such highest political and spiritual authorities as Mussolini and the corrupt Pope. Unable to find satisfaction in religion, he turns to the city of art Paris to seek solace. However, when he arrives in Paris, he discovers that art has been misused: “Now Paris, our black classic, breaking up / like killer kings on an Etruscan cup.” [67]

Lowell sees Christianity at odds with the violence of war and asserts that Christianity forces one to engage with the present and to share Christian revelation to redeem the violent modern world. Realizing that contemporary man’s redemption is denied through art, he decides again to turn to religion. In “The Wood of Life,” Lowell offers a Christian view of redemption. He ends the poem by acknowledging the power of the cross:

> Christ Crucified is all our reason
>
> And most in this dark hour
>
> We will invoke, O Cross, your power,
>
> Our prime, at best, is Passion’s season. [68]

In this violent world, Lowell sees Christian redemption as the only hope.

3. Impersonal Personalism and Political Commitment of Lowell’s Confessional Poetry

In his confessional poetry, Lowell uses his personal experiences to address spiritual, political and social issues. The personal reflections of poets represent a departure from the

66. Lowell, *Achievement*, 57.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.

Eliotic aesthetics that poetry is not the expression of personality but an escape from personality. In the following passage from “Memories of West Street and Lepke,” Lowell relies on his personal experience to depict his situation as part of the American political scene:

> These are the tranquilized *Fifties*,
> and I am forty. Ought I to regret my seedtime?
> I was a fire-breathing Catholic C.O.,
> and made my manic statement,
> telling off the state and president, and then
> sat waiting sentence in the bull pen
> beside a Negro boy with curlicues
> of marijuana in his hair. [69]

On the one hand, the poet describes himself in prison as a conscientious objector with “a Negro boy.” On the other hand, he challenges the idea of American war policy followed by “the state and president.”

Lowell also combines his collection of personal forces and some historical figures to express his disillusionment with politics. In “The March 1,” he describes the march on the Pentagon in October against the War in Vietnam in October, 1967. Lowell describes the march from his personal perspective by focusing on his bored self in his attempt “to keep [his] wet glasses from slipping” [70] while he sees “the cigarette match quaking in [his] fingers.” [71]

The same allusive method combined with his personal experience is employed by Lowell to discuss such issue as the failure of marriage in modern age. Lowell juxtaposes the picture of unstable marriage of his parents and the marriage breakdown of Marie de Medici and King Henry IV of France. In his prose accounts “Revere Street,” Lowell presents his

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69. Ibid.
70. Lowell, *Collected Poems*, 545.
71. Ibid.

mother who urges his father to leave the naval and forces him to deed his property to her. Lowell overtly states that his "parent's confidences and quarrels stopped each night at ten or eleven o'clock, when my father would hang up his tuxedo, put on his commander's uniform, and take a trolley to the Naval Yard at Charlestown." [72] Though this passage relies on his personal experience of his parents' marital relation to describe the failure of marriage, it is foreshadowed by the marriage failure of Marie de Medici and King Henry IV in "The Banker's Daughter." This marriage represents a lashing marriage because Marie de Medici is twenty years older than her husband. Their marriage, like Lowell's parents' marriage, is full of hatred and is doomed to failure.

5. Conclusion

Eliot's poetry with its religious sensibility attracted Lowell in revolt against the secular ideologies. Yet, Lowell departs from Eliot's by creating poetry that is more objective and more concerned with political matters.

72. Robert Lowell, *Life Studies, and For the Union Dead* (New York: Noonday Press, 1967), 22.

Lecture Twenty: Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five:* Background

1. Introduction

The aim of this introductory lecture to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* is to provide general information about the novel. The author's biography, the context in which the novel was written and its plot summary helps understand postmodern aspects of the novel in terms of form and content discussed in the following chapters.

2. Author Bibliography

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., was born November 11, 1922, the youngest of three children to Kurt Vonnegut and Edith Lieber, celebrated members of the Indianapolis upper class. Kurt Sr. was a successful young architect whose father was the first architect licensed by the state of Indiana. His mother Edith grew up in the opulence of the Lieber fortune, built through the success of the P. Lieber & Company brewery in Indianapolis. The Vonnegut were descendants of German immigrants and like many literate Germans Vonnegut adopted the precepts of Free Thinking—not only those that deny the existence of a Christian (or any other) God, but also its emphasis on human decency.

Kurt, Bernard and Alice whom were raised in the high society the Vonneguts enjoyed, attended private schools throughout their formative years. The market crash of 1929 and its aftermath had severely weakened the Vonnegut's finances, the closing of the Lieber brewery during Prohibition in 1921 , and the virtual non-existence of architectural work and Kurt Jr. had to attend public school.

Vonnegut's German ancestry, too, has shadowed his life and writing though his parents consciously kept Vonnegut from his German heritage as following the anti-German sentiment in America during the World War I.

Certainly as a literary influence Vonnegut has aligned himself with the great satirists like Voltaire, Swift and Mark Twain .Vonnegut even named his son Mark after the great American humorist. However, " Vonnegut calls his mother his most important influence as a writer, his mother who envisioned making "a new fortune by writing for the slick magazines

Vonnegut's later enlistment into the Army in 1943 proved too much for her. Tragically, he was approved for a special leave to go home for Mother's Day, but she committed suicide the day before he arrived. In 1957 Vonnegut's father died alone in a small cottage in the woods. In 1958,His Sister Alice's husband dies in commuter train accident; Alice dies of cancer less than forty-eight hours later. The effects of economics on the mental well-being of individuals is a theme visited often in Vonnegut's fiction, and characters who face suicide are ubiquitous.

The beginning of Vonnegut's experiences in journalism, orienting him towards a career in writing was , *Shortridge Daily Echo,* a daily newspaper owned by the Indiana public school.By his junior year, he became the editor of the Tuesday edition. He enlisted in March of 1943 after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and sent to Europe as a battalion scout for the 106th Infantry Division. Captured, he was taken to a prison camp for a time, then sent to Dresden, where thousands of other POW's were being held. Though Dresden was a city known to house no troops and support no war industries, on February 13–14, U.S. and British air forces firebomb Dresden, killing 135,000. Vonnegut and other POWs, quartered in the cellar of a slaughterhouse, survive.

He married Jane Cox, on September 1, 1945, and moved to Chicago to pursue a Master's degree in anthropology in December of that year. Vonnegut relished his studies there. In 1952 he published his First novel, *Player Piano.* In 1969 he published *Slaughterhouse-Five; or the Children's Crusade* and becomes best-seller.

His twenty-five-year marriage to Jane Cox Vonnegut became unworkable and they separated in 1971. On November 24, 1979, Vonnegut was plagued with depression in the early seventies, and nearly suicidal. Vonnegut married his second wife, who helped him "regain my equilibrium" (xix).

During this time Vonnegut was also gaining recognition from academic circles. In 1971 he was awarded an M.A. by the Universityof Chicago for *Cat's Cradle,* and he was elected Vice President of P.E.N. American Center. He also became a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters to which he would be elected Vice President in 1975. And finally he was awarded an honorary Litt.D by Hobart and William Smith College in 1974.

3. A Historical Introduction: The Bombing of Dresden

The bombing of Dresden began February 13, 1945, and lasted through April 17—a period of two months—yet even today, it remains one of the most controversial military decisions in modern warfare. Why this premier cultural city was devastated during World War II continues to be clouded in mystery. Two contradictory reasons for the bombing have emerged. First, with the Russian army advancing on the Eastern Front, German forces before being solidified to repel the Russians and needed to be "softened," thereby allowing the Russians to advance more easily. Second, with the war winding down and the Western Allies and Russians realizing that conquered land would be up for grabs, the bombing would demonstrate to the Russians the immense power of the Western Allies (the United States, Great Britain, and France) and would deter the Russians from grabbing land; besides, if the Russians occupied land that the Western Allies wanted, the bombing would devastate the land, making it worthless.

The number of persons killed during the two-month bombing of Dresden is impossible to pinpoint precisely. Estimated casualties range from 35,000 up to 135,000, a disparity due in part to the chaotic nature of all wartime bombings. The great number of refugees flooding into

Dresden from the outlying regions, desperately hoping to escape the oncoming Russian army, the city was destroyed and civilians were killed to a greater extent by far than ever occurred in the Germans' bombing of London. The image of a destroyed Dresden that once housed one of the greatest art collections in the world and was truly one of the renowned musical and architectural centers can still cause entirely different reactions, ranging from those who say that the bombing was necessary for military and political reasons, to those who claim that the bombing was a senseless and unnecessary act, aimed only at destroying German neighborhoods where strategic installations did not even exist.

4. Plot Synopsis

Slaughterhouse-Five is an account of Billy's captures and incarceration by the Germans during the last years of World War II, and scattered throughout the narrative are episodes from Billy's life both before and after the war, and from his travels to the planet Tralfamadore. Billy is able to move both forwards and backwards through his lifetime in an arbitrary cycle of events. Enduring the tedious life of a 1950s optometrist in Ilium, New York, he is the lover of a former pornographic movie star on the planet Tralfamadore and simultaneously an American prisoner of war (POW) in Nazi Germany.

Vonnegut uses Billy's ability to travel in time as a device to evoke a wide range of scenes from Billy's life. The multidimensional panorama points out the importance of cyclical time and psychological experience during events that receive equal emphasis in linear time. While some scenes become so jumbled that they seem to have no cause or effect, we must remember Vonnegut's comments on the title page. He suggests that this narrative is "schizophrenic," and he invites us to become psychologists helping Billy make sense of his life.

Slaughterhouse-Five's central topic is the horror of the Dresden bombing. As a witness to the destruction, Billy confronts fundamental questions about the meanings of life and death.

Traumatized by the events in Dresden, Billy can provide no answers. As a soldier, he is dislocated in a system where there is no reward, no punishment, and no justice. Although his life as an optometrist, a husband, and a father is materially fulfilling, he is unable to find peace of mind because of the trauma he suffered in Dresden.

Ultimately, Billy reconciles this trauma with the acceptance of the Tralfamadorian doctrine that there is no such thing as free will: Billy cannot change the past, the present, or the future. In the final analysis, Vonnegut suggests that life is like a simple, meaningless limerick, a nonsensical verse that never ends because it continuously repeats itself. At the beginning of *Slaughterhouse- Five*, the bird's song asks, "Poo-tee-weet?" at the end of the novel, Billy hears the bird still asking the same simple, meaningless question.

5. Literary Contexts

Early in his career, Vonnegut was considered a science fiction writer because his first two novels were set in the future and included space ships, super computers, and other technological gadgets. However, he does not consider himself a science fiction writer. Instead, he argues that all writers need to learn more about science because it has become such an important part of human life. Vonnegut also objects to the "science fiction" label because it is often used as a way of refusing to take writers seriously. Following the lead of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Vonnegut uses the conventions of science fiction to force his readers to think more deeply about the world we actually live in. He imagines other worlds because they allow him to point out what is wrong with contemporary society. Seen in this light, Vonnegut becomes part of the older tradition of satire, where new worlds are imagined in order to criticize our own. Vonnegut imagines future worlds and distant places not for their own sake, but for the power they give him to point out what is wrong back home. Yet, he also rejects this label because Vonnegut's stubborn desire to resist categorization, as well as his public image as a literary outsider who is reluctant to engage in critical games.

Vonnegut, and others could be considered ‘‘black humorists” because they encourage their readers to laugh at hopeless situations. Vonnegut is often considered an experimental or “postmodern” writer. Although postmodernism is difficult to define precisely, it involves a reaction against the belief that science can reveal the truth about the world. Postmodernists argue that truth is not “objective,” meaning that it is not out there in the world waiting to be discovered. Instead, truth is “subjective” because it depends on how different individuals look at the world, and it varies from person to person. In literature, postmodern ideas have led writers to abandon the traditional form of the novel in favor of experimental forms that show how people create their own subjective truths. Rather than rely on third-person narrators who supposedly provide an objective viewpoint, postmodern writers generally prefer first-person narrators who are aware of their own limited understanding of the events they describe. Postmodern novels also call attention to the fact that they are novels by commenting on the writing process and reminding their readers that they are reading a novel, not getting a glimpse of real life. However, even as they critique traditional forms, postmodern novels create new ones and contribute to the evolution of literary traditions.

The postmodern label calls attention to several important aspects of Vonnegut’s work, but like the other labels already discussed, it does not fit precisely. onnegut is often considered an experimental or “postmodern” writer. Although postmodernism is difficult to define precisely, it involves a reaction against the belief that science can reveal the truth about the world. Postmodernists argue that truth is not “objective,” meaning that it is not out there in the world waiting to be discovered. Instead, truth is “subjective” because it depends on how different individuals look at the world, and it varies from person to person. In literature, postmodern ideas have led writers to abandon the traditional form of the novel in favor of experimental forms that show how people create their own subjective truths. Rather than rely on third-person narrators who supposedly provide an objective viewpoint, postmodern writers

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Slaughterhouse-Five introduced readers to "the telegraphic schizophrenic manner of tales of the planet Tralfamadore," and American literature has not been quite the same since. Vonnegut's writing resembles telegraphic messages because all unnecessary words are left out. Short chapters are divided up into even shorter sections and placed side-by-side without the usual connections to lead readers from one to the next. This technique forces readers to make their own connections and highlights the subjective nature of reading a Vonnegut novel. For all of these reasons, Vonnegut may be considered an experimental, postmodern writer.

6. Conclusion

Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five is based on Kurt Vonnegut's own experience in World War II. It is a postmodern novel that tackles the atrocities of war and the bombing of Dresden.

Lecture Twenty-one: Postmodern Tenets in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*

1. Introduction

The aim of this lecture is to examine how the American author Kurt Vonnegut uses many postmodern techniques in his *Slaughterhouse-Five*. It discusses how metafiction, fragmentation, intertextuality, and hybridity of genres are used as reminders of the fictionality of the book. By using these techniques, the author also defies explanation his portrayal of the horrors of war.

2. Metafiction

Metafiction is a strategy of making the artificiality of art or the fictionality of fiction apparent to the readers. As a Postmodern novel relying on metafiction, the first chapter of *Slaughterhouse Five* is a writer's preface about how he came to write his novel. The writer apologizes because the novel is "so short, jumbled and jangled" (12) and because "there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre." Perhaps most helpful is Vonnegut's discussion in chapter 1 of his failed attempts at writing a traditional narrative about Dresden—one with an Aristotelian beginning, middle, and end:

As a trafficker in climaxes and thrills and characterization and wonderful dialogue and suspense and confrontations, I had outlined the Dresden story many times. The best outline I ever made, or anyway the prettiest one, was on the back of a roll of wallpaper. I used my daughter's crayons, a different color for each main character. One end of the wallpaper was the beginning of the story; and the other end was the end, and then there was all that middle part, which was the middle. And the blue line met the red line and then the yellow line and the yellow line stopped because the character represented by the yellow line was dead. And so on. The destruction of Dresden was represented by a vertical band of orange cross-hatching, and all the lines that were still alive passed through it, came out the other side. (5)

Metafiction serves as quick general guidelines to Billy's life and provides the reader with a strong sense of direction from the outset.

3. Time Narratives and Fragmentation

The narrator of the novel reports that Billy Pilgrim has come "unstuck in time" on account of his traumatic experience in the wake of the Dresden air raid. Billy undergoes the experiences of his life discontinuously (he experiences past and future events out of sequence and repetitively, following a non-linear narrative). Thus, the reader enjoys two narrative threads: Billy's experience of war which is mostly linear and his discontinuous pre-war and post-war events. As Billy has come "unstuck in time", his life does not end with death; he relives his death, before its time, an experience often mingled with his other experiences. Becoming a freed prisoner at the end of the German war, Billy is kidnapped by extraterrestrial aliens from the planet Tralfamadore. They teach Billy about time's relation to the world as fourth dimension, fate and death's indiscriminate nature. As the protagonist Billy travels forward and backward in time, he spends time on Tralfamadore, in Dresden, in the war, walking in deep snow before his German capture, in his mundane post-war married life in the U.S.A. of the 50's and in the moment of his murder by Lazzaro. He has so little control over his own life that he cannot even predict which part of it he will be living through from minute to minute.

3- Intertextuality

Intertextuality can also be a reference or parallel to another literary work, an extended discussion of a work or the adoption of a style. In Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse - Five*, for instance, science fiction novelist Kilgore Trout, often an important character in other novels is shown as a social commentator and a friend to Billy Pilgrim. Other crossover characters are Eliot Rosewater from *God Bless you, Mr. Rosewater*, Howard W. Campbell from *Mother*

Night and Bertram Copeland Rumfoord, relative of Winston Niles Rumfoord from *The Sirens of Titan* (1959).

Intertextuality in the novel creates a blending of high and low literature in *Slaughterhouse- Five that* causes uncertainty and suspension in the reader's mind. According to Anja welling in chapter one a woman who is a colleague of the narrator eats " a three musketeers candy Bar" (8) which is an example of "high literature" the three musketeers was written by Alexander Duma, the same parodic pattern is observed in Billy's comrades including Roland Weary and two scouts who "called themselves the three musketeers" (24) but the point behind the above-mentioned examples is that Dumas' masterpiece is eaten as a candy by a writer and his title is given to three foot soldiers not as a nostalgic view of the past but as an ironic rethinking of the past. Therefore, the notion of war is degraded and the suspicion of the open-minded readers who are shocked by the parody is increased so that the realistic mode of previous eras is under estimated.

4. Hybridity of Genres

Hybridity means the use of different genres and styles within the same book: letters, historical books and poems. These genres contribute to highlight the horror of the destruction of Dresden and to introduce the Tralfamadorian vision of this destruction, a vision which is understandable when logic is reversed and open cities without troops or war industries are chosen for bombing.

a- Song: On the first two pages, Vonnegut introduces a song about the cyclical story about Yon Yonson:

> *My name is Yon Yonson,*
>
> *I work in Wisconsin,*
>
> *I work in a lumbermill there.*
>
> *The people I meet when I walk down the street,*

They say, 'What's your name?

And I say,

'My name is Yon Yonson,

I work in Wisconsin... (3)

The last line of the song is the first, and so there is no escape, no clean way to end it. This theme of time foreshadows the time travel of Billy Pilgrim

b- Historical books:

The passage excerpted from the first chapter is a good example:

> History in her solemn page informs us that the Crusaders were but ignorant and savage men, that their motives were those of bigotry unmitigated, and that their pathway was one of blood and wars. Romance, on the other hand, dilates upon their piety and heroism, and portrays, in her most glowing and impassioned hues, their virtue and magnanimity, the imperishable honor they acquired for themselves, and the great services they rendered to Christianity. And then O'Hare read this: Now what was the grand result of all these struggles? Europe expended millions of her treasures, and the blood of two million of her people; and a handful of quarrelsome knights retained possession of Palestine for about one hundred years! *(11)*

This passage is from *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, by Charles Mackay. Since it was written in 1841, this book does not seem to be the kind of book that would cite for historically accurate information. The selection of a text situated well outside of modern academic historical writing and the attendant search for factual truth reinforces that historical "truth" is not a concern when engaged in creating tragic myth.

c- **Letters:**

In the second chapter, Billy writes a letter to a newspaper describing the Tralfamadorians:

> The most important thing I learned on Tralfamadore was that when a person dies he only *appears* to die. He is still very much alive in the past, so it is very silly for people to cry at his funeral. All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Tralfamadorians can look at all the different moments just that way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them. It is just an illusion we have here on Earth that one moment follows another one, like beads on a string, and that once a moment is gone it is gone forever.
>
> When a Tralfamadorian sees a corpse, all he thinks is that the dead person is in a bad condition in that particular moment, but that the same person is just fine in plenty of other moments. Now, when I myself hear that somebody is dead, I s imply shrug and say what the Tralfamadorians say about dead people, which is 'so it goes.'" (16)

The letter introduces Tralfamadore to suggest that the cyclic time or the eternal present will enable himself and mankind to accept the unacceptable. The sin of Dresden is so great that it will require an eternity to expiate. However, eternity is not available to all men- only to Tralfamadorians and the pilgrim soul of man, and Vonnegut has, out of his science-fiction heritage, created both.

5. Conclusion

Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five is a postmodern novel that attacks the grand narratives. While traditional literature glorifies both war and warriors, Vonnegut follows most postmodern tenets to denounce the atrocities of the war and the bed essects it has on people

Lecture Twenty-two: Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five as a Mock-Heroic Novel

1. Introduction

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* is an antiwar novel. Since the novel parodies a classical epic that glorifies war Vonnegut uses the same conventions as those the classical epics but usually in a trivial way.

2. Plot

An epic is a long poem. It is the most suitable type for expressing great deeds and stories of battles orally. The length of the poem is due to a technique called "the epic catalogue", in which poets, such as Homer, take time to explain the events, the weaponry, the heroes, the soldiers and so on. Mock-epic, authors intend to make their works shorter Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a short story.

3. Invocation to the Muse

For example, Homer's *The Odyssey* opens with "O muse, sing to me of the man full of resources" and his *The Iliad* also opens with "Sing, goddess, sing of the rage of Achilles". The writer in both cases was seeking a divine influence of the muse or the goddess. Vonnegut begins his anti-war short novel *Slaughterhouse-Five* with verses taken from a famous Christmas Carole *Away in the Manger*:

> The cattle are lowing,
>
> The Baby awakes.
>
> But the little Lord Jesus
>
> No crying he makes. (2)

Throughout the story, the protagonist Billy Pilgrim endures many hardships, yet he does not cry. However, in chapter nine, and after seeing the condition of his horses, Billy can no longer handle it and he "burst into tears" (108) for the first time in the war.

4. Journey's Hero

The hero has to set on a journey. Throughout this journey he faces multiple crises which contribute to forge his personality of an epic hero. In Homer's *The Odyssey,* The hero "Odysseus" sets off on his journey to return to his home Ithaca after fighting in The Trojan War. He is thrown into the world of adventure, when raiding all those islands. Billy Pilgrim believes that in outer space there exists a planet called Tralfamadore, whose inhabitants are a race of weird looking aliens who can control time. The creatures are friendly, and they can see in four dimensions. They pity Earthlings for being able to see only in three dimensions. Billy creates Tralfamadore as an escape from the horrors he witnessed on earth.

5. Descriptions of Weaponry in Epics vs. Descriptions of Ordinary Objects in Mock-Epics:

Homer takes time to describe the bow which is used by Odysseus at the end of the poem to win his wife back. All of those men proposing to Penelope could not stretch the bow except for its owner. In *Slaughterhouse-Five,* Billy is unarmed. He is "six feet and three inches, with a chest and shoulders like a box of kitchen matches, had no helmet, no overcoat, no weapons, and no boots" (19) ; thus, he "was powerless to harm the enemy or to help his friends" (18) The fact that Billy Pilgrim is a World War II soldier, who is behind enemy lines and has no armory is another proof provided by Kurt Vonnegut that proves that his *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a satirical work.

6. The Divine Intervention

The divine intervention in the Epic is highly present; a direct intervention by the gods in an epic is when the god Apollo directed Paris's arrow to the heel of Achilles causing his

death. In *Slaughterhouse-Five,* the creatures are a mere of the protagonist's imagination. The beings are a race of aliens from a planet called Tralfamadore. According to Billy, the aliens existed in all times at the same time, thus they know the future. The ability Billy has of being "unstuck in time" (14) is passed down to him by his abductors. Billy's Tralfamadorian experience is a symptom of Schizophrenia, a mental disorder that makes it difficult for him to tell the difference between real and unreal experiences and to behave normally in social situations.

7. Description of Scenes from the Underworld

Teiresias is the blind prophet who tells Odysseus of his coming adventures and what he will encounter. Teiresias tells him of the hardships he is to meet on his way to Ithaca, such as losing all his comrades and going back alone. Odysseus leaves the underworld as a wiser man. In A situation reminiscent of the mythic journey to the underworld is Billy's descent into the meat locker which is hollowed out in the living rock under the slaughterhouse. It is the shelter of the American POW' s during the air raid. Billy' s emergence from the underworld, however, breaks the mythic pattern, for, on his return to the land of the living, he finds himself instead in another land of the dead: 135,000 corpses in a landscape as desolate as the moon, nothing but minerals.

8. **The Description of Battles in Epic**

The traditional epic heroes are known for their bravery and chivalry. In contrast, the protagonist of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is weak and defenseless as the soldier Billy Pilgrim. Those epic heroes go through a challenging journey, in which they have to prove their strength and come back triumphant. In contrast, Billy comes back from the war suffering from Post Trauma Stress Disorder and hallucination. At the time of the war, Billy was considered a joke, not having any skills, or training and not even proper cloths, yet he does not respond. In Vonnegut's *Slaughtehouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim, as a soldier, does not fight heroic battles. Billy

is always being pushed around and treated badly, either by the Germans, his enemy, or by his fellow American soldiers. Even the Tralfamadrians when they abduct him they place him in a cage in their zoo. Billy does not fight back, he only manages to say "why me?" (50).

9. Conclusion

The traditional epic conventions such as invocating the muse, descriptions from bloody battles and underworld, or even the hero's journey and his weapons are used to glorify nations, battles and heroes. However, these elements are used Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* to express his dissatisfaction with his country's policy during times of national and international conflicts.

Lecture Twenty-Three: Devaluation of Traditional Epic Subjects of Nationhood, Love and Heroism

1. **Introduction:** This lecture shows how the traditional epic subjects of nationhood, love and heroism suffer a devaluation in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*

2. **Questioning the Nation's Ideals**

The traditional epic is a literary genre that celebrates the foundation of the nation. The Roman poet Virgil, for example, composed an epic of twelve books, entitled *The Aeneid* to commemorate the foundation of the Roman nation and to celebrate the ancestors of the Romans who established the great city of Rome.

Kurt Vonnegut in his turn was not thrilled with the American involvement in the Second World War and the carnage it caused. As a prisoner of war himself, he witnessed these unfortunate events first hand in Dresden. The ideals of liberty, equality and freedom that America has celebrated for so long are put into question in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Vonnegut shows a distrust of the American Government that does not respect its own ideals and hides the horrific Dresden Bombing of February 13-14, 1945, during the Second World War, from the public eye. The United States as a powerful country is supposed to save humanity instead of destroying it. In addition, Vonnegut's German American heritage pushed him to criticize the American society for not reacting against the massacre and ignoring its moral responsibility. Vonnegut goes further and criticizes the American ideals through the character of Edgar Derby, the patriotic soldier, who believes wholeheartedly in those ideals and defends them as he says: "with freedom and justice and opportunities and fair play for all. He said there wasn't a man there who wouldn't gladly die for those ideals" (89) only to get executed for a trivial reason which is the act of stealing a teapot from the Dresden rubbles.

Heroes of the classical order reflect the honor and the values that their nations stand for. In *Slaughterhouse-Five,* the American soldiers, who fought in the Second World War, reflect only barbarity and inhumanity by ravaging a peaceful city, regarded as one of the most beautiful cities in the world, an open museum, just as a show of force and pure violence. By these criminal acts, the American soldiers did nothing but dishonoring their nation and betraying their sacred ideals.

Throughout *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Vonnegut depicts the horror inflicted upon the Germans as well as the unspeakable destruction of their city. Vonnegut also describes the American soldiers who enacted the raid as “puppets whose strings were being pulled by more powerful fingers belonging to those individuals that could be held as accountable.” By these “individuals” Vonnegut is referring to the American government’s officials who ordered such a senseless air raid. Vonnegut gives a vivid description of the aftermath of the raid as he speaks about it in his novel saying that “Dresden was like the moon now, nothing but minerals. The stones were hot. Everybody else in the neighborhood was dead”(98).

3. Failure of Love

In the traditional epics, love is one of the most important reasons behind wars. In *The Iliad*, the ten years Trojan War happens solely because of the abduction of a beautiful woman, Helen of Sparta. Similarly, *The Odyssey* is also motivated by love, Odysseus journeys back to his homeland after twenty years to be reunited with his wife, Penelope. His love encourages him to overcome all the ordeals that he faces through his journey back to Ithaka. In addition, many women have attempted to seduce him among them is the nymph Kalypso, a beautiful goddess that offered him the gift of immortality and love to live with her. Unlike Odysseus’ profound love to his wife, Billy Pilgrim does not love his wife, Valencia Merble. Valencia is a good natured wife, she loves her husband deeply. Thanks to her wealthy father, the owner of an optometry school in Ilium, Billy has the opportunity to study and to become a wealthy man

as well. Valencia cares so much about Billy as she is very happy and full of gratitude for marrying him because he is her only chance due to her big size. Throughout the story, she is always eating chocolate bars while making promises to her husband to lose weight in an attempt to please him but to no avail as she cannot stop eating. Despite Valencia's love and affection, Billy finds her unattractive as she is ugly and fat, he often describes her "as big as a house." He goes further and mocks her glasses describing them as having a "harlequin frames." Billy considers his marriage from Valencia a crazy thing. He thinks that the wealth he hasgained is a reward for marrying such a horrible woman.

Due to the war, Billy is psychologically unbalanced, as a result, he imagines another woman in the planet Tralfamadore with whom he falls in love and eventually has a child with her. This woman is named Montana Wildhack, a beautiful movie star aged twenty years. She is also abducted by the Tralfamadorians to be Billy's companion in the zoo. Montana is the opposite of Billy's wife; she is beautiful, young and attractive. This woman is the product of Billy's imagination and disillusionment as she is not real while his wife is real. She possesses the feminine qualities that his wife lacks. Unlike Odysseus' refusal to respond to the women's advances when he is away, Billy's love affair in Tralfamadore shows that he is not faithful to his wife. In fact, Billy feels that he is trapped by marrying Valencia and when he hears the news of her death he is not affected and does not care about her although she died in accident, suffocated by carbon monoxide gas in her car, as she was driving with eyes full of tears, terrified that something happened to Billy after his plane crash.

4. War and Heroism

Homer's great epic *The Iliad* recounts extensively the last ten days of the Trojan War and focuses on the idea of heroism and heroic honor. In *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Billy Pilgrim, the main character is very satirically described, is weak, unheroic, unskilled and poorly physically shaped creature. Billy is a confused young man who suffers from post-traumatic

stress disorder, he is always panic stricken because of the horrors he has witnessed in World War II, and he fears that world war III might come, when a simple “siren went off, [it] scared the hell out of him. He was expecting the Third World War at any time” (32). His participation in the war is not fierce enough for him to have any fear, and throughout the war he is numb and delusional yet he survives.

Billy is inexperienced, coward and inept; he is the complete opposite of the typical American war soldier. After joining the regiment, he “never even got to meet the chaplain. He was supposed to assist, was never even issued a steel helmet and combat boots.” (19). Three years after the end of the war, Billy committed himself into a mental institution, at the time he has “found life meaningless, partly because of what [he] had seen in war” (56) . Billy suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder for the reason that he “had seen the greatest massacre in European history, which was the firebombing of Dresden” (56).

5. Conclusion

Slaughterhouse-Five is about the uselessness of the American Wars, the diminution of the seriousness of love and the questioning of the American nation’s policy. The novel also shows how the protagonist Billy Pilgrim is driven him to the point of insanity.

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