A Brief Guide to Modernism [1]

"That's not it at all, that's not what I meant at all"
--from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," by T.S. Eliot

The English novelist Virginia Woolf declared that human nature underwent a fundamental change "on or about December 1910." The statement testifies to the modern writer's fervent desire to break with the past, rejecting literary traditions that seemed outmoded and diction that seemed too genteel to suit an era of technological breakthroughs and global violence.

"On or about 1910," just as the automobile and airplane were beginning to accelerate the pace of human life, and Einstein's ideas were transforming our perception of the universe, there was an explosion of innovation and creative energy that shook every field of artistic endeavor. Artists from all over the world converged on London, Paris, and other great cities of Europe to join in the ferment of new ideas and movements: Cubism, Constructivism, Futurism, Acmeism, and Imagism were among the most influential banners under which the new artists grouped themselves. It was an era when major artists were fundamentally questioning and reinventing their art forms: Matisse and Picasso in painting, James Joyce and Gertrude Stein in literature, Isadora Duncan in dance, Igor Stravinsky in music, and Frank Lloyd Wright in architecture.

The excitement, however, came to a terrible climax in 1914 with the start of the First World War, which wiped out a generation of young men in Europe, catapulted Russia into a catastrophic revolution, and sowed the seeds for even worse conflagrations in the decades to follow. By the war's end in 1918, the centuries-old European domination of the world had ended and the "American Century" had begun. For artists and many others in Europe, it was a time of profound disillusion with the values on which a whole civilization had been founded. But it was also a time when the avant-garde experiments that had preceded the war would, like the technological wonders of the airplane and the atom, inexorably establish a new dispensation, which we call modernism. Among the most instrumental of all artists in effecting this change were a handful of American poets.

Robert Frost (1874—1963)

Though his work is principally associated with the life and landscape of New England, and though he was a poet of traditional verse forms and metrics who remained steadfastly aloof from the poetic movements and fashions of his time, Frost is anything but a merely regional or minor poet. The author of searching and often dark meditations on universal themes, he is a quintessentially modern poet in his adherence to language as it is actually spoken, in the psychological complexity of his portraits, and in the degree to which his work is infused with layers of ambiguity and irony.

“The Tuft of Flowers”

[1] From poets.org

Audio link: http://robertfrostoutloud.com/TheTuftOfFlowers.html

I WENT to turn the grass once after one
Who mowed it in the dew before the sun.

The dew was gone that made his blade so keen
Before I came to view the leveled scene.

I looked for him behind an isle of trees;
I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.

But he had gone his way, the grass all mown,
And I must be, as he had been,—alone,

'As all must be,' I said within my heart,
'Whether they work together or apart.'

But as I said it, swift there passed me by
On noiseless wing a 'wildered butterfly,

Seeking with memories grown dim o'er night
Some resting flower of yesterday's delight.

And once I marked his flight go round and round,
As where some flower lay withering on the ground.

And then he flew as far as eye could see,
And then on tremulous wing came back to me.

I thought of questions that have no reply,
And would have turned to toss the grass to dry;

But he turned first, and led my eye to look
At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook,

A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared
Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared.

I left my place to know them by their name,
Finding them butterfly weed when I came.

The mower in the dew had loved them thus,
By leaving them to flourish, not for us,

Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him.

But from sheer morning gladness at the brim.

The butterfly and I had lit upon,
Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,

That made me hear the wakening birds around,
And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground,

And feel a spirit kindred to my own;
So that henceforth I worked no more alone;

But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,
And weary, sought at noon with him the shade;

And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech
With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.

'Men work together,' I told him from the heart,
'Whether they work together or apart.'

T.S. Eliot (1888—1965)

Thomas Stearns Eliot was born in Missouri on September 26, 1888. He lived in St. Louis during the first eighteen years of his life and attended Harvard University. In 1910, he left the United States for the Sorbonne, having earned both undergraduate and masters degrees and having contributed several poems to the *Harvard Advocate*. After a year in Paris, he returned to Harvard to pursue a doctorate in philosophy, but returned to Europe and settled in England in 1914. As a poet, he transmuted his affinity for the English metaphysical poets of the 17th century (most notably John Donne) and the 19th century French symbolist poets (including Baudelaire and Laforgue) into radical innovations in poetic technique and subject matter. His poems in many respects articulated the disillusionment of a younger post-World-War-I generation with the values and conventions—both literary and social—of the Victorian era. T. S. Eliot received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1948.

“The Hollow Men” by T. S. Eliot

Mistah Kurtz—he dead.

A penny for the Old Guy

I

We are the hollow men
We are the stuffed men
Leaning together
Headpiece filled with straw. Alas!
Our dried voices, when
We whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
As wind in dry grass
Or rats’ feet over broken glass
In our dry cellar

Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralysed force, gesture without motion;

Those who have crossed
With direct eyes, to death’s other Kingdom
Remember us—if at all—not as lost
Violent souls, but only
As the hollow men
The stuffed men.

II

Eyes I dare not meet in dreams
In death’s dream kingdom
These do not appear:
There, the eyes are
Sunlight on a broken column
There, is a tree swinging
And voices are
In the wind’s singing
More distant and more solemn
Than a fading star.

Let me be no nearer
In death’s dream kingdom
Let me also wear
Such deliberate disguises
Rat’s coat, crowskin, crossed staves
In a field
Behaving as the wind behaves

No nearer—

Not that final meeting
In the twilight kingdom

III

This is the dead land
This is cactus land
Here the stone images
Are raised, here they receive
The supplication of a dead man's hand
Under the twinkle of a fading star.

Is it like this
In death's other kingdom
Waking alone
At the hour when we are
Trembling with tenderness
Lips that would kiss
Form prayers to broken stone.

IV

The eyes are not here
There are no eyes here
In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our lost kingdoms

In this last of meeting places
We grope together
And avoid speech
Gathered on this beach of the tumid river

Sightless, unless
The eyes reappear
As the perpetual star
Multifoliate rose
Of death's twilight kingdom
The hope only
Of empty men.

V

Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear
At five o'clock in the morning.

Between the idea
And the reality
Between the motion
And the act
Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception
And the creation
Between the emotion
And the response
Falls the Shadow
Life is very long
Between the desire
And the spasm
Between the potency
And the existence
Between the essence
And the descent
Falls the Shadow
For Thine is the Kingdom
For Thine is
Life is
For Thine is the

This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper.

List the allusions, what they mean, and how they affect the poem's tone. Use this hypertext version: **http://www.aduni.org/~heather/occs/honors/Poem.htm**

“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” by T.S. Eliot

S'io credesse che mia risposta fosse
A persona che mai tornasse al mondo,
Questa fiamma staria senza piu scosse.
Ma perciocche giammai di questo fondo
Non torno vivo alcun, s'i'odo il vero,
Senza tema d'infamia ti rispondo. (1)

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized (2) upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust (3) restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question . . .
Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo. (4)

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time
For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,
Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;
There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;
There will be time to murder and create,
And time for all the works and days of hands
That lift and drop a question on your plate;
Time for you and time for me,
And time yet for a hundred indecisions,
And for a hundred visions and revisions,
Before the taking of a toast and tea.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

And indeed there will be time

To wonder, "Do I dare?" and, "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair,
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair--
[They will say: "How his hair is growing thin!"]
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin--
[They will say: "But how his arms and legs are thin!"]
Do I dare
Disturb the universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse.

For I have known them all already, known them all:--
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons;
I know the voices dying with a dying fall
Beneath the music from a farther room.
So how should I presume?

And I have known the eyes already, known them all--
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

And I have known the arms already, known them all--
Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
[But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!]
Is it perfume from a dress
That makes me so digress?
Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
And should I then presume?
And how should I begin?
. . . . .
Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets
And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes
Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? . . .

I should have been a pair of ragged claws
Scuttling across the floors of silent seas.

. . . . .

And the afternoon, the evening, sleeps so peacefully!
Smoothed by long fingers,
Asleep . . . tired . . . or it malingers,
Stretched on the floor, here beside you and me.
Should I, after tea and cakes and ices, (5)
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?

But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in upon a platter, (6)
I am no prophet--and here's no great matter;
I have seen the moment of my greatness flicker,
And I have seen the eternal Footman hold my coat, and snicker,
And in short, I was afraid.

And would it have been worth it, after all,
After the cups, the marmalade, the tea,
Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me,
Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, (7) come from the dead
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all"--
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
Should say: "That is not what I meant at all.
That is not it, at all."

And would it have been worth it, after all,
Would it have been worth while,
After the sunsets and the dooryards and the sprinkled streets,
After the novels, after the teacups, after the skirts that trail along the floor--
And this, and so much more?--
It is impossible to say just what I mean!
But as if a magic lantern (8) threw the nerves in patterns on a screen:
Would it have been worth while
If one, settling a pillow or throwing off a shawl,
And turning toward the window, should say:
"That is not it at all,
That is not what I meant, at all."

. . . . .

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, (9) nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse
At times, indeed, almost ridiculous--
Almost, at times, the Fool.

I grow old . . .I grow old . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.

Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach.

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each. *125*

I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea *130*
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

(1) A passage from Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* (Canto 27, lines 61-66) spoken by Guido da Montefeltro in response to the questions of Dante, who Guido supposes is dead, since he is in Hell:. The flame in which Guido is encased vibrates as he speaks: "If I thought that that I was replying to someone who would ever return to the world, this flame would cease to flicker. But since no one ever returns from these depths alive, if what I've heard is true, I will answer you without fear of infamy."
(2) Anesthetized with ether; but also suggesting "made etherial," less real.
(3) Cheap bars and restaurants used to spread sawdust on the floor to soak up spilled beer, etc.
(4) The great Renaissance Italian artist.
(5) Cookies and ice cream.
(6) Like John the Baptist (see Matthew 14: 1-12)
(7) A man raised from death by Jesus (see John 11: 1-44).
(8) Early form of slide projector.
(9) Shakespeare's sensitive hero known for procrastination.

Study Questions for T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

Vocabulary: allusion, alter ego, catachresis, dramatic monologue, epigraph, persona, simile, stream of consciousness, synecdoche
Lecture or Handouts: Explain how the two characters of "Apeneck Sweeney" and "J. Alfred Prufrock" represent two halves of the human condition in the twentieth century.
Identify the following characters and images:
J. Alfred Prufrock, John the Baptist, Michelangelo, the Eternal Footman, Lazarus, Prince Hamlet, singing mermaids
Reading Questions:

- Read the translation of the quotation in Italian from Dante's *Inferno* that serves as our epigraph, and return to it once you have finished the whole poem. Why do you suppose T.S. Eliot wants to begin the poem this way? How is the damned soul speaking his secrets from the flames of hell in a similar situation to J. Alfred Prufrock? How is the audience of that damned soul (Dante's persona) in a similar situation to the audience listening to J. Alfred Prufrock's frantic confessions?
- In the opening line, the speaker states, "Let us go then, you and I." Who is the *you* here? (Several possibilities here).
- The speaker (Prufrock) compares the sunset to a "patient etherised upon a table." Why do you suppose Prufrock would compare a sunset to some hospital patient who has been anesthetized and is waiting for an operation?

- The speaker refers to the surrounding cityscape as having "one-night cheap hotels" and "sawdust restaurants." What is this part of town like, apparently?
- In the second stanza, we have two lines that are disjointed from the earlier stanza. Here, Prufrock's mind appears to flash to a different location, where the "women come and go / Talking of Michelangelo." Who was Michelangelo? If the women are spending all their time talking about high Renaissance art, how must their situation and their location be different from Prufrock's current place of wandering?
- The next stanza break flashes away from the room with the women. Where are we now? Have we returned to the first location? Why or why not?
- What is the yellow fog compared to in a simile? How is the fog like such a creature?
- What does Prufrock mean when he says, "There will be time, there will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet"? Have you ever had to "prepare a face" before you have met someone? Why would one try to prepare an artificial face?
- Prufrock says "there will be time to murder to create." Is he being literal here, and talking about actually killing people and creating new ones? Or does this connect with the earlier passage about "preparing a face?" Or does it connect with the latter passage about "a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred indecisions"?
- Prufrock says there will be time for all this "Before the taking of a toast and tea." Apparently, Prufrock is trying to boost his courage before undertaking what frightening mission? Why would such a simple task be so terrifying to Prufrock?
- After a fifth stanza that flashes back to the room of artsy women, the sixth stanza has Prufrock asking, "Do I dare?" and "Do I dare?" What is that Prufrock is daring himself to do? Why is he so frightened about that room full of brainy women discussing art?
- Prufrock reassures himself that there will be "Time to turn back and descend the stair." What does he mean by this, i.e., what can he do if he changes his mind? Why do you suppose T. S. Eliot chooses the verb *descend* rather than *ascend*? Does this connect with the Dante quotation about a guy trapped in hell in any way?
- What physical features cause Prufrock anxiety as he imagines going down the stairs? What does he imagine people will say about him?
- What does Prufrock mean, "Do I dare / Disturb the universe?" How can one thin, balding, aging man disturb the entire universe?
- What does Prufrock mean, "I have measured out my life in coffee spoons"? How big is a coffee spoon? How regularly does a person use such as spoon?
- What does Prufrock mean when he says he has already known the "eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase"? How can the way someone looks at you or the way someone uses a "formulated" label for you leave you fixed in place and trapped?
- Prufrock imagines people's eyes stabbing through his body and impaling him to the wall where he wriggles as people examine him--why would Prufrock use this imagery from bug-collecting? How is appropriate or inappropriate?
- Prufrock asks how he can begin to spit out all the "butt-ends" of his days and ways. If a butt-end is the left-over bit of a smoked cigar, what does he imply about how he has spent his life?
- When Prufrock says he has "known the arms" already, how is this an example of synecdoche? What is he talking about? Why is so strangely excited to note that these bare, braceleted arms with white skin are lightly downed with faint hair?
- What does Prufrock think is
- Explain the anastrophe in "arms that wrap about a shawl." Think about it for a moment: what's weird about the phrasing?
- Note the synecdoche in lines 73-74. Why doesn't Prufrock compare himself to a complete crab? Why is a crab particularly appropriate for Prufrock generally? (Ask a marine biologist about the way crabs travel and see how it matches the way Prufrock travels through life....)
- Explain the biblical allusion to John the Baptist in lines 81-82.
- Who are what is "The Eternal Footman"? Why is this footman or servant snickering at Prufrock?

- In line 87, the verb tense switches to rhetorical pluperfect "would it have been worth it?" What does this shift in verb tense indicate? What changes in Prufrock's mind or in his plans between lines 86 to line 87?
- Explain how Prufrock is connected to Lazarus in lines 94 *et passim*? How does this reference to coming back from the dead also connect with Dante and the initial epigram at the beginning of the poem?
- What do we make of Prufrock's protest that he is not "Prince Hamlet"? Why is it ironic or appropriate that Prufrock thinks of Hamlet as his epitome of a great hero? (Think back to Hamlet's nature in *Hamlet*....)
- Why is Prufrock agonizing over how to wear his trousers?
- What's odd about the way Prufrock contemplates combing his "hair behind"? Does one normally comb his hair from the rear to cover the forward part of the head? What does this suggest about the aging Prufrock's hair and why he combs his hair forward this way?
- Why is Prufrock stymied by the thought of eating peach? Why would eating a peach in public be problematic for him?
- Prufrock imagines beautiful mermaids singing along the beach, but what does he fear or doubt in the following line?
- Prufrock imagines himself under the water with the mermaids in "chambers of the sea." What happens at the end though when he hears the conversation of human voices around him that awakens him from his daydream?

Passages for Identification: Be able to explain who wrote this passages, what work they come from, and briefly explain their significance, context, or importance in the work.

A: Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherised upon a table?

B: In the room, the women come and go
Speaking of Michelangelo.

C: And indeed, there will be time
To wonder, "Do I dare?" and "Do I dare?"
Time to turn back and descend the stair
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair."

D: For I have known them all already, known them all--
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.

E: Should I, after tea and cakes and ices,
Have the strength to force the moment to its crisis?
But though I have wept and fasted, wept and prayed,
Though I have seen my head [grown slightly bald] brought in upon a platter,
I am no prophet, and here's no great matter.

F. Would it have been worthwhile,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question?

G: I grow old . . . I grow old. . . .
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.
Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?

I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk along the beach.
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think they will sing to me.

H: We have lingered in the chambers of the sea,
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Wallace Stevens (1879-1955)

Stevens began to establish an identity for himself outside the world of law and business, and his first book of poems, *Harmonium*, published in 1923, exhibited the influence of both the English Romantics and the French symbolists, an inclination to aesthetic philosophy, and a wholly original style and sensibility: exotic, whimsical, infused with the light and color of an Impressionist painting. More than any other modern poet, Stevens was concerned with the transformative power of the imagination. Composing poems on his way to and from the office and in the evenings, Stevens continued to spend his days behind a desk at the office, and led a quiet, uneventful life.

"The Emperor of Ice-Cream"

by Wallace Stevens

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal.
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.
Let the lamp affix its beam.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Marianne Moore (1887-1972)

Moore was widely recognized for her work; among her many honors were the Bollingen prize, the National Book Award, and the Pulitzer Prize. She wrote with the freedom characteristic of the other modernist poets, often incorporating quotes from other sources into the text, yet her use of language was always extraordinarily condensed and precise, capable of suggesting a variety of ideas and associations within a single, compact image. In his 1925 essay "Marianne Moore," William Carlos Williams wrote about Moore's signature mode, the vastness of the particular: "So that in looking at some apparently small object, one feels the swirl of great events." She was

particularly fond of animals, and much of her imagery is drawn from the natural world. She was also a great fan of professional baseball and an admirer of Muhammed Ali, for whom she wrote the liner notes to his record, *I Am the Greatest!*

Poetry

by Marianne Moore

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

high-sounding interpretation can be put upon them but because
they are
useful. When they become so derivative as to become
unintelligible,
the same thing may be said for all of us, that we
do not admire what
we cannot understand: the bat
holding on upside down or in quest of something to

eat, elephants pushing, a wild horse taking a roll, a tireless
wolf under
a tree, the immovable critic twitching his skin like a horse
that feels a flea, the base-
ball fan, the statistician--
nor is it valid
to discriminate against "business documents and

school-books"; all these phenomena are important. One must make
a distinction
however: when dragged into prominence by half poets, the
result is not poetry,
nor till the poets among us can be
"literalists of
the imagination"—above
insolence and triviality and can present

for inspection, "imaginary gardens with real toads in them,"
shall we have
it. In the meantime, if you demand on the one hand,
the raw material of poetry in
all its rawness and
that which is on the other hand
genuine, you are interested in poetry.

Langston Hughes (1902—1967)
Hughes, who claimed Paul Lawrence Dunbar, Carl Sandburg, and Walt Whitman as his primary influences, is particularly known for his insightful, colorful portrayals of black life in America from the twenties through the sixties. He wrote novels, short stories and plays, as well as poetry, and is also known for his engagement with the world of jazz and the influence it had on his writing, as in "Montage of a Dream Deferred." His life and work were enormously important in shaping the artistic contributions of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Unlike other notable black poets of the period—Claude McKay, Jean Toomer, and Countee Cullen—Hughes refused to differentiate between his personal experience and the common experience of black America. He wanted to tell the stories of his people in ways that reflected their actual culture, including both their suffering and their love of music, laughter, and language itself.

The Weary Blues

by Langston Hughes

Droning a drowsy syncopated tune,

Rocking back and forth to a mellow croon,

I heard a Negro play.

Down on Lenox Avenue the other night

By the pale dull pallor of an old gas light

He did a lazy sway . . .

He did a lazy sway . . .

To the tune o' those Weary Blues.

With his ebony hands on each ivory key

He made that poor piano moan with melody.

O Blues!

Swaying to and fro on his rickety stool

He played that sad raggy tune like a musical fool.

Sweet Blues!

Coming from a black man's soul.

O Blues!

In a deep song voice with a melancholy tone

I heard that Negro sing, that old piano moan--

"Ain't got nobody in all this world,

Ain't got nobody but ma self.

I's gwine to quit ma frownin'

And put ma troubles on the shelf."

Thump, thump, thump, went his foot on the floor.

He played a few chords then he sang some more--

"I got the Weary Blues

And I can't be satisfied.

Got the Weary Blues

And can't be satisfied--

I ain't happy no mo'

And I wish that I had died."

And far into the night he crooned that tune.

The stars went out and so did the moon.

The singer stopped playing and went to bed

While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.

He slept like a rock or a man that's dead.

The Negro Speaks of Rivers

by Langston Hughes

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the

flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln

went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy

bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

e.e.cummings (1894-1962)

In his work, Cummings experimented radically with form, punctuation, spelling and syntax, abandoning traditional techniques and structures to create a new, highly

idiosyncratic means of poetic expression. Later in his career, he was often criticized for settling into his signature style and not pressing his work towards further evolution. Nevertheless, he attained great popularity, especially among young readers, for the simplicity of his language, his playful mode and his attention to subjects such as war and sex.

dying is fine)but Death
by: e.e. cummings

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dying is fine)but Death

?o
baby
i

wouldn't like

Death if Death
were
good:for

when(instead of stopping to think)you

begin to feel of it,dying
's miraculous
why?be

cause dying is

perfectly natural;perfectly
putting
it mildly lively(but

Death

is strictly
scientific
& artificial &

evil & legal)

we thank thee
god
almighty for dying
(forgive us,o life!the sin of Death
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in Just-
by: e.e. cummings

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in Just-
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spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloonman

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

the queer
old balloonman whistles
far and wee
and bettyandisbel come dancing

from hop-scotch and jump-rope and

it's
spring
and
the

goat-footed

balloonMan whistles
far
and
wee