**Kindness in Modernist American Poetry.**

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**Abstract:**

This thesis poses the question, 'can we find Kindness in modernist American poetry?' It is a work comprised primarily of detailed and extended close readings that will track Kindness through selections from the works of Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Louis Zukofsky, George Oppen and Charles Reznikoff. Working within an understanding that no interpretation can be naïve, this thesis argues a case for Kindness as a "grammar of reading" that accounts for the readerly experience of the neophyte by considering the notion of "reading in exile". This is undertaken not only as an ethical step towards accessibility in texts that are conventionally identified as presenting a stark and difficult aesthetics but also with the historical considerations of the relationship between high art and mass culture, with which recent thought on modernism is concerned (Huyssen, Perelman, Jennison). This "grammar of reading" is developed through interpretations of twenty-first century theorists such as Derek Attridge ("singularity"), Jane Bennett ("vibrant matter") and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick ("reparative reading" and the "paranoid position"). The theoretical work of this "grammar of reading" is based around the notion of "behaviour" as it evinces a potential critical position that can account for naïveté, vulnerability, and not knowing within reading and within poems themselves. The attendant aim of this project then is to explore the potential and implications of identifying a recognizable Kindness in early-twentieth century modernist poetry.

# Contents:

# Introduction: "Preparation of the Palette"[1]

> *Alas! Ladies and gentlemen, Art has been maligned. She has naught in common with such practices. She is a goddess of dainty thought—reticent of habit, abjuring all obtrusiveness, purposing in no way to better others.*
>
> *She is, withal, selfishly occupied with her own perfection—only having no desire to teach—seeking and finding the beautiful in all conditions and in all times, as did her high priest, Rembrandt, when he saw a picturesque grandeur and noble dignity in the Jew's quarter of Amsterdam, and lamented not that the inhabitants were not Greeks.*
>
> J. A. McNeill Whistler *The Ten O'Clock Lecture*

The October 1912 edition of Harriet Monroe's magazine *Poetry* contains Ezra Pound's "To Whistler, American", a poem that does not formally astound but does demonstrate an interesting negotiation that Pound is beginning to enter into. By 1912, J. A. McNeill Whistler was dead but his influence on art continued to be felt. He had lived and worked for the great majority of his life in Europe, mostly London. So when Pound entitles his ode to the great painter with the qualifier "American" he is asserting an important point of note—that Whistler, one of the most influential artists of the 19th Century in Europe, was in fact American. Pound reminds his readers, largely American themselves, of the great creative potential of their countrymen. He concludes this poem by taking a typically irreverent, even scornful, attitude to the artist's country of origin: "You and Abe Lincoln from that mass of dolts/Show us there's a chance at least of winning through".[2] The poem rejoices in Whistler's capacity to experiment, to "stretch", "pry", "tease", and "tamper" and thanks him for this legacy on behalf of those artists "Who bear the brunt of our America/And try to wrench her impulse into art".[3] Bearing the brunt of America is an important consideration for this thesis. For Pound, the "brunt" consisted of "provincialism" and what he considered to be petty minded bourgeois thinking as he discusses in his 1913

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[1] Ezra Pound, in a Letter to Felix E. Shilling, Paris, 8-9th July 1922, reprinted in Ezra Pound, *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941, edited by D. D. Paige* (London: Faber and Faber, 1950), 247.

[2] Ezra Pound, *Personæ: Collected Shorter Poems*, rev. and ed. by Lea Baechler and A. Walton Litz (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), 249.

[3] Pound, *Personæ*, 249.

essay "Patria Mia".[4] This notion of the "brunt" of America represents part of the kind of emotional negotiation that I want to examine in this thesis. The question of the ever changing "brunt" of America is particularly relevant in the work of the later poets— Reznikoff, Oppen, and Zukofsky—that I will examine; changing in critically, historically and socially informed terms for both poets and thinkers alike, in addition to the aesthetic experimentation that Pound extols in Whistler's varied oeuvre.

It is evident from the claim in the Whistler quote above, and from Pound's poem, that while aesthetic art in the Whistlerian early modernist tradition purports not to seek any didactic influence it also considers its own ideological position unassailable. It is vital to the modernist genre that it maintain a global and historical hierarchy that informs the aesthetic and which can be fruitful but not really negotiated. Whistler admires Rembrandt for his capacity to see that the Jews of Amsterdam were not in fact Greek, by which I think he means ancient Greek, and for his ability not to regret that. In this moment of admiration, Whistler acknowledges by disavowing the hierarchy that maintained mid-17th Century Dutch Jewry as inherently inferior in relation to a rather general notion of Greek classicism. The relationship between the Hellenic and Hebraic will also prove to be an important point of discussion in this thesis. While Whistler's work is not central to my thesis his influence sets up an important discussion around aesthetic and ethical discourses that will persist and frame the thesis as a whole. In addition, Whistler's juxtaposition of the Hebraic and Hellenic here demonstrates a relationship of ongoing importance to modernist aesthetics and one that is central to this thesis.

Pound demonstrates his own adherence to a classical, Eurocentric hierarchy when he finds only Lincoln and Whistler in American history to shine amongst the "mass of dolts" whence they all come. Pound's relationship with America will be addressed in Chapter 2 as it features in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". The poem almost begins with the lament "seeing he had been born | In a half-savage country, out of

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[4] To quote Pound more fully on his approved forebears: "Whitman established the national *timbre*. One may not need him at home. It is in the air, this tonic of his. But if one is abroad; if one is ever likely to forget one's birth-right, to lose faith, being surrounded by disparagers, one can find, in Whitman, the reassurance. Whitman goes bail for the nation.

Whistler was our martinet and left his message, almost, it would seem, by accident. It was in substance, that being born an American is no excuse for being content with a parochial standard. It is all very well to say that Whistler was European, but it does not affect my argument.

If a man's work require him to live in exile, let him suffer, or enjoy his exile gladly. But it would be about as easy for an American to become a Chinaman or a Hindoo [sic] as for him to acquire an Englishness, or a Frenchness or a European-ness that is more than half skin deep."
Ezra Pound, *Patria Mia* (Chicago: Ralph Fletcher Seymour: 1950), 65.

date" and then the poem, protagonist and we might also infer, the poet swiftly depart for London.[5] Pound's acrimony toward his "patria" instigates his ode to the Classics; the text is predicated upon the idea that the poet's sensibilities could not survive in America. Indeed, "America" and "American-ness", or perhaps an American experience, are often central to the poems I will be reading here. The negotiation of Americanness is vital to the time and location of the production of these poems and is frequently crucial to my understanding of their aesthetic/ethical position. In the context of this thesis, therefore, aesthetics refers to the aesthetic tradition as it develops post-Flaubert with the advent of European modernism. It describes a focus on visual presentations as unassailable instances of integrity, which propose a specific negotiation with public "morality" and presents an ethical position that defines a certain aesthetic pursuit, as both representative of and as an arbiter of "truth". This development of the aesthetic/ethic relationship is tied up in the complexities of early twentieth-century understandings of America, as new, immigrant, modern, and culturally ambitious. What we see in the opening quotation is that Whistler expresses an understanding of what became known as the aesthetic tradition. That is, art must have no other significance than its aesthetic beauty. Aesthetics, then, apparently renounces ethics in the work of one of Pound's important forebears. But Whistler's oratory from 1885 is compromised in many ways which form the very subject of this thesis. Whistler's evocation of the aesthetic tradition is inherently informed by a specific ethical position, thereby making the term "aesthetic" particularly useful to my thesis which aims to at least partially address for example: the notions of responsibility and vulnerability in the poetic endeavour; the problems of moral certainty in aesthetic production; and the negotiations of a legacy of experimental freedom within new historical contexts.

Moreover, the ethical and aesthetic accords and discords discernible in the Whistler and Pound pieces above inform the body of the thesis as a whole, which is largely concerned with reading and the appeal of Whistler's aestheticist, utopic position that art need not only answer moral questions but also must somehow be immune to ethical considerations which would in turn isolate art from the period of its production. However, it also struggles with Pound's totalizing ethics of language and the prejudices inherent in his works that are produced, he believes, in a version of the

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[5] Pound, *Personæ*, 185.

Whistlerian ideology that would not completely absolve art from political responsibility but instead grant the work of art itself the impunity of certainty by virtue of aesthetic notions of truth. The distinction that develops during the 1885-1912 period is that while Whistler commends Rembrandt for *"not lamenting"* that the Jews of Amsterdam were *not* Greek, Pound, quite often, laments anything that isn't Greek. Within this framework his Anti-Semitism, totalitarianism, and fascism thrive as almost aesthetic principles, therefore, anti-Semitism, and indeed Semitism for that matter, receive detailed attention throughout this thesis, particularly in the second half.

I have, in part, written this thesis as the result of a desire to read Imagist work in an ethically responsible way that still manages to appreciate its often profound aesthetic moments. I don't mean to suggest that this is a new position; Peter Quartermain, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Marjorie Perloff, Mark Scroggins, Peter Nicholls, Tim Woods and, most recently, Ruth Jennison are all engaged in similarly vital discussions of Imagist, and Objectivist traditions and implications in poetry. Additionally, Joan Retallack's *The Poethical Wager* (2003) has also provided inspiration and critical stability for my own close readings and attempt to delineate an alternative methodology by her assertion that "the form of the essay—as urgent and aesthetically aware thought experiment—[is] to undertake a particular kind of inquiry that is neither poetry nor philosophy but a mix of logics, dislogics, intuition, revulsion, wonder", not to mention her notion of "poethics", what she defines as a "poetics of responsibility".[6] All of these thinkers have been central to my proposing what I term Kindness as a "grammar of reading" as a way of reading, thinking, and writing about poetry, a method of ordering reading that has an aesthetic priority for ethical reasons. Kindness is my chosen term because, as a noun, it presents a quality which a reader can possess or acquire as a means to engage with the poems I examine here. It also presents a quality in the poems themselves which a reader might discern through a reading of Kindness because of all the approaches that my critical forebears have provided. That said, Kindness, can be accessible to the neophyte because it presents a "grammar of reading" that can invite a critical approach to reading without requiring that the reader be explicitly aware of the cultural body that has produced

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[6] Joan Retallack, *The Poethical Wager* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4.

this study of Kindness in modernist American poetry as a critical text.[7] As a "grammar of reading", Kindness helps to organize and clarify affective reading strategies, in addition to engendering a transactional interpretive paradigm that conceives of the poem as an event as explained in Louise Rosenblatt's and Derek Attridge's work. As a "grammar of reading", the structuring method of ordering language, Kindness considers content and form to be one, while also acknowledging the extraordinary moments of linguistic encounter that are possible in always compromised, yet still somehow uncompromising, "poethical" historical moments. Such a "grammar of reading" develops this position amidst the *thing* focused ideology informing Jane Bennett's "vibrant materiality", thus positing the poem as an event while also recognizing its object-ness through a series of detailed close readings and "aesthethic" interpretations that make them working models for a particular method of reading, in this case, short American modernist poems.

The term Kindness is used because it has a variety of cognates. The "kith and kin" aspect of the term encourages a more revised, historicized approach to the idea of the Objectivists in the Imagist legacy and how this has affected scholarship on them, with Woods and Jennison addressing this issue most convincingly. The "singularity" of "one of a kind", *sui generis*, can refer to Attridge's formulations regarding the "other" and the "same", where a particular way of reading or a specific type of poem necessitates a more fluid approach to critical understandings of the processes of reading and understanding. The "kin" of Kindness even evokes Olson's ideas of "*kin*etics" in "Projective Verse." Eve Sedgwick's work is crucial here to discussing what I term (after her) a "paranoid" attitude. But most importantly, Kindness is concerned with an approach that means to consider alternative reading values by seeking alternatives to certain critical models. Kindness as a "grammar of reading" offers an alternative accountability for readers that reimagines value in the reading experience not only to protect against potential accusations of naïveté or vulnerability but precisely because these positions are so consistently considered to be faults.

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[7] In "A Retrospect" Pound writes: "Let the neophyte know assonance and alliteration, rhyme immediate and delayed, simple and polyphonic, as a musician would expect to know harmony and counterpoint and all the minutiae of his craft. No time is too great to give to these matters or to any one of them, even if the artist seldom have need of them." Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect" in
*Literary Essays of Ezra Pound,* ed. and intro. by T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), 6.

## A brief context for Kindness

In *Patria Mia*, Pound writes that "Whitman goes bail for the nation", picking up the check for cultural deficits that embarrass Americans who travel to the continent or merely care about its global cultural reputation.[8] The point that Pound makes however, is one that is central to this thesis: "If a man's work requires him to live in exile, let him suffer, or enjoy his exile gladly".[9] In discussing the condition of "exile" for the American artist, Pound evidently considers that in order to be a good or true artist, the American must locate him/herself in Europe, whether physically or imaginatively, a position he recognises that consequently led to his own exile. Such exile is a central trope of Kindness, a way of reading in exile where this state of being functions as a means for identifying particularly susceptive texts, or to phrase it another way, texts that are particularly conducive to delineating a Kindness as an alternative "grammar of reading". Indeed, it is the notion of exile on a variety of levels (cultural, canonical, linguistic) that brings together the texts analysed in this thesis. Moreover, Kindness, it might be argued can be identified in the texts I will examine and because they are informed by the notion of exile, in a variety of ways they provide a good basis upon which to develop Kindness as a "grammar of reading". The sense of exile Pound felt due to his frustration from a perceived lack of attachment to American culture and the more recent exiling of his poem addressing this topic, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", from the canon make it ripe for study in terms of Kindness. William Carlos Williams's "French" text *Spring And All* plays at the front line of the avant-garde, inhabiting edges and negotiating the burgeoning American avant-garde, that is, by inhabiting a space between traditions the poem belongs to neither and is consequently exiled from both. Louis Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The'" is largely overlooked by literary critics today as it is considered to be a preparatory exercise for his life's work *A*, thus resulting in it being somewhat exiled from discussions of his work in the last fifteen years. Rather tellingly, the poem, which is ultimately a treatment of exile and assimilation, was first published by Pound in *The Exile*. Like so much of the Objectivist, second-wave modernist work, Charles Reznikoff's poetry consistently struggles with exile in cultural terms, voicing both the inadequacies and the opportunities that hegemonic first-wave modernism

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[8] Pound, *Patria Mia*, 65.
[9] Pound, *Patria Mia*, 65.

affords newly self-identified "American" writers that do not experience the same levels of cultural entitlement as those belonging to longer, indigenous genealogies of cultural and national identities. Finally, George Oppen exiled himself from the poetic project for almost thirty years after the publication of *Discrete Series* in 1931, a text collection which Michael Heller describes as "a desperate cry in the poetic-political wilderness over insufficient means".[10] This instance of self-exiling exemplifies a conflict pertinent within most critical debates on modernist literature today: the difficulty of language in the theoretical, philosophical whirlwind comprised of a dialectical, structural thought scheme that is immersed in reframing understandings of the ethics of writing itself.

In this "grammar of reading" I present, I will both argue for and demonstrate reading Kindness in exile. Kindness as a "grammar of reading" is informed by exile as a way of understanding how we might read, and relate to texts. Kindness can most succinctly be presented as a heuristic hermeneutics through reparative readings that consider how poems behave in exile by considering the value of reading them in exile. The sense of exile that Kindness embraces is considered best as naïveté, this is an adjustment to the aesthetic/formalist idea that severs the object of attention from its immediate socio-cultural and historical context thereby exiling it. The adjustment to this is a critical and ethical precedent that proposes a "grammar of reading" that can engage with a poem as an object and an event that is other than an artifact in a critical capacity and furthermore demonstrates that there is value in that engagement.[11] Naïveté and indeed vulnerability become relevant to the discourse through Kindness as a "grammar of reading."

In recent years there have been important developments in critical understandings of first and second-generation modernisms that account for a reciprocal relationship with culture and inform how we read modernism today.

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[10] Michael Heller 'Objectivists in the Thirties: Utopocalyptic Moments', in *The Objectivist Nexus: Essays in Cultural Poetics*, ed. by Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 140-160, 153.

[11] Peter Quartermain is discussing the imperatives immigration placed on creative expression in U.S. based American modernism. One proposal he makes or rather method of accounting for these myriad voices—that could be considered by the hegemonic academy to represent naïveté—is to read the poem as object. He writes: "In thinking of poems as objects, not only does the writer have no control over what the poem might mean to its reader, but the ground of meaning is shifted from what perhaps had best be called a series of cultural imperatives (such as the use of symbolism to reinforce certain social attitudes and beliefs) to the very act of reading itself. *Value is thus shifted from artifact to process* [my emphasis]." Peter Quartermain, *Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 16.

Andreas Huyssen's *After the Great Divide*, (1986) succinctly outlines this vexed relationship, which Jennison then utilizes in the materialist analyses that make up *The Zukofsky Era*. Perelman's *The Trouble with Genius* similarly undertakes a consideration of the discourse and disparity between the masses and the "geniuses" that sought to influence them, characterizing this relationship as generally acrimonious on the part of the writer and at best ambivalent on the part of the reading public. One crucial observation Perelman makes, however, is fundamental to understanding Kindness:

> Although it could be easily argued that this naïve reading would be worthless, it would be more accurate to consider it a constitutive feature of these works. The blankness that they proffer the neophyte needs to be considered as an integral part of their meaning, and not simply to be blamed on inadequate readers, schools, or societies…In the case of difficult modernism there is no document of refined criticism that is not at the same time a chasm of anxious boredom for many readers.[12]

Interestingly, the neophyte is something of an exile from literary criticism since his/her comprehensions only interest those concerned with reader-response theories. S/he is not constituted by the same presuppositions and expectations as the professional critic or thinker because s/he may not have formally studied literature according to a method endorsed by an academic institution. My position here is supported by Peter Quartermain's ideas of the relevance of a naïve reading that he explores through an analogy about a desk. He posits:

> Looking for news about love and hate in poems is to read with a predatory eye. It is the *form*, even the gestalt, of the desk that matters—someone unversed in economics or in the history of furniture design can still discern the *desk*, not the wood its built of. Cultural baggage seriously impedes the act of reading, whether we are reading poems or reading desks, by fostering confusion between historical (economic or whatever) fact and "poetic fact."[13]

A position of naïveté, can, help delineate Kindness as a "grammar of reading" that unblocks different avenues of understanding poetics. The poems to be examined here were written with a certain consciousness of exile and, Kindness aims to allow readers to appreciate reading in exile in the same way writing in exile is valued in

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[12] Bob Perelman, *The Trouble With Genius: Reading Pound, Joyce, Stein, and Zukofsky* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1994), 12.
[13] Quartermain, 16.

these poets' work. "Reading in exile" is the term I use to describe a readerly experience that is not necessarily informed by or comfortable within academic confines. This notion can describe (but is not limited to) the experiences of those who might find reading difficult, or feel they are not entitled to engage with texts, be they "high-brow" or otherwise. "Reading in exile" is a term that I use to frame professional academic responses to texts as examples of privileged performative thinking, Kindness as a "grammar of reading" means to consider alternative value in "naïve", "vulnerable" or "unprofessional" modes of reading with a hope that this will expand the academic field which encounters difficulty recognising and absorbing these readings. I should note that I do not propose to make this argument in a vacuum, indeed a central tenet of Kindness as a "grammar of reading" is the reparative relationship with the ideoculture of any reader that is "vibrant" in his/her reading. To frame the argument in methodological terms, it would be reparative readings of a poem's textual "behaviour" that consider the poem's "vibrant singularity", a method that imaginatively combines Sedgwick's, Attridge's and Bennett's critical propositions.

An analysis seeking to engage with the "behaviour" of a poem with a view to promoting reading as a reparative process is not an entirely new position. Most recently, Retallack's notion of the "unholy union"[14] can be seen to similarly foreground the practice of Kindness in reading, although she couches it in explicitly "poethical" terms:

> I think about the forms of life the artist brings into the work and then the completion of the artist's part of the work as resulting in a kind of "score" for the reader or viewer, I wonder about the poethics of the kind of realization it invites. Those kinds of thoughts, it seems to me lead to the possibility of a contextual criticism based on poethical analysis rather than judgement.[15]

While Kindness is not strictly a "poethical" way of reading, it does embrace a sense of the inextricable nature of the ethical and the aesthetic in poetic production. Moreover, it shares the ambition to some degree that Retallack sets forth when she describes the function of a "poethical" agenda in thinking as "a frank and unholy union of modernist and postmodernist questions joined to the Aristotelian concern for

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[14] Retallack, 11.
[15] Retallack, 43.

the link between an individual and public ethos in pursuit of the good life".[16] The foreground of Kindness is the link between the modernist and the postmodern in the sense that I have outlined above: an inquiry into the naïve value of reading modernists in a postmodern context. Retallack invented the term "poethics" in the late 1980s "to characterize his (John Cage's) aesthetic of making art that models how we want to live".[17] Kindness as a "grammar of reading" has a similar goal in that it seeks to accommodate how we might want to read, which can only ever be properly understood in the context of the academy that determines the methods of reading currently available at any one time.  The "good life" is also a pursuit of Kindness in terms of reading in a manner that is generous and empathetic, or to phrase it in more critical terms, that is open-ended and responsive.[18]

In *Blue Studios*, Objectivist scholar Rachel Blau DuPlessis sets out a case for feminist critical thinking by observing the deficit between the objectives of feminist writing and the advances of feminist thinking within the context of critical literary theory. She defines her project as creating a "blue studio" designed to allow for considerations of cultural, political, and poetical relationships with the world through ideas of negativity and the artist as hopeful:

> A Blue Studio is a pensive work site where a new world is hoped and an old can interrupt this hope. Thus it is a place of conflict and cross motives. Blue studio is particularly a metaphor for working through negativity, an idea that threads through this book…This book creates a blue space for thinking about the terrain to traverse while watching a horizon for change. *Blue Studios* proposes cultural work that poetry does and could do and some work for a poet-critic, facing a practice involved with such a vulnerable mix of desolation and hope.[19]

This thesis hopes to build its own "blue studio", a place of hope similar to how DuPlessis defines the postpatriarchal essay as one that:

> offers a method of thought and an ethical attitude, not simply a style or a rhetorical choice. It is a method of the passionate, curious, multiple-vectored, personable, and invested discussion, as if a person thinking were simply talking in the studio of speculation, grief, and utopia. Essays can break the

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[16] Retallack, 11.
[17] Retallack, 44.
[18] Retallack, 11.
[19] Rachel Blau DuPlessis, *Blue Studios: Poetry and its Cultural Work* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press 2006), 1.

normalizing dichotomy between discursive and imaginative writing, between the analytic and the creative.[20]

Although DuPlessis is not advocating for a consideration of the neophyte, she does outline a position that might accommodate him/her. This thesis, therefore, seeks to "break the normalizing dichotomy between discursive and imaginative", re-imagining the role and function of the essay according to DuPlessis's argument as having "an ethos of porous, lambent, intense examination, an antiauthoritarian play of perpetual dialects".[21] Such a reparative position reveals the ethical ambitions of this project.

After Kindness the most crucial critical term in this thesis is "behaviour," which refers to the particular mode in which texts will be investigated. I search for "behaviour" in poetry as a means of discerning Kindness, since "behaviour" describes an accepted idea of reality as it is physical, evident and human rather than just an efficacious "reality" in a text that is evidently not "real" as its "reality" is subject to the expectation of the reader. How a poem is organized, or written, constitutes its "behaviour". As an anthropomorphic term, it offers insights into, if not completely alternative perspectives on, readings that are at once cultural and formal, ethical and aesthetic. Steve McCaffery's work on the protosemantic produces a broad new plane upon which to consider poetry, as his declaration of intent in *Prior to Meaning* reveals, it "studies the ways in which language behaves rather than how it's designed to function. It traces a limited autonomy of the written mark at a level both beneath and around the semantic".[22] McCaffery's poststructuralist analysis engages with notions of the Epicurean clinamen, (which Retallack also writes about as the "swerve") and the monadic fold as developed by Deleuze and Guattari—McCaffery also develops on the Barthesian notion of the letter or word as innocent, as pre-fall. Although a contemporary idea of aesthetics mediated through Barthes will be relevant to the set up of Kindness for this thesis my use of McCaffery's project is limited to setting a precedent that allows for a study of "behaviour" in terms of Kindness and exile as addressed above. "Behaviour" is very much exiled by New Critical, formalist, new-historical/cultural considerations of modernist poetics, which advance a hierarchical cultural order that values certain modes of reading to the exclusion of

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[20] DuPlessis, *Blue Studios*, 3.
[21] DuPlessis, *Blue Studios*, 39-40.
[22] Steve McCaffery, *Prior to Meaning: the Protosemantic and Poetics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2001), xv.

others. The "grammar of reading" that Kindness offers allows both for a space within which, and the means by which to value the experience of reading *and* the object/event being read/encountered. While McCaffery explicitly advances the requirement to study "behaviour," my readings have more in common with the imperatives of DuPlessis's "blue studio" and the work of Sedgwick, Bennett, and Attridge, than his explicatory interpretations.

## **Methodological context and strategy.**

Through analyses of selected early poems by Pound, Williams, Zukofsky, Reznikoff, and Oppen, this thesis will examine how Kindness offers a "grammar" that allows for reparative readings which encourage considerations of how poems "behave". My close readings begin however, with a focus on *Tender Buttons* by Gertrude Stein. I make these readings as a foundational strategy to establish what Kindness is not in order to achieve greater clarity in my subsequent readings and negotiations with Kindness. This thesis is arranged chronologically to give structure to an argument that, while being historically contextualized, nevertheless fundamentally resists the hierarchies that historicism supports. Such structure also follows a geographical migration that is often considered to define the movement of modernism in Western culture from Europe to America. This grand narrative also helps to formalize an argument that accommodates both identity and understanding through reading. Kindness is informed by both the ethical and the aesthetic while being singularly comprised by neither. Rather, it represents a negotiation that binds these two approaches to the poem as, respectively, an event and an object together.

The nineteenth poem in Charles Reznikoff's *Rhythms II* demonstrates this complex negotiation of event/object and the requirement for a reparative reading:

> We heard no step in the hall.
> She came
> sudden as a rainbow.[23]

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[23] Charles Reznikoff, *The Poems of Charles Reznikoff; 1918-1975,* ed. by Seamus Cooney (New Hampshire: Black Sparrow Books, 2005), 14.

The poem provides an a-historical moment in which "singularity," appearance, transcendentalist sensibilities, "vibrant materiality," Imagist experimentation, and a sense of gentleness are inextricably bound together that exemplifies the type of poems that generate Kindness as a necessary "grammar of reading". It allows for common threads between Imagism and Objectivism to be found other than those usually asserted. Furthermore, Kindness can be identified in both movements in an effort to alleviate the pressures that each exacts on the other: the oppressive legacy of the Imagist movement and the largely unattended to brilliance of the Objectivists. My study begins with Stein because her work explores a type of hermetic vulnerability that is pivotal to any general discussion of the significance of vulnerability to Kindness. Subsequently, a largely comparative reading of Pound and Williams together will be followed by a central chapter addressing Zukofsky before concluding with a final chapter on Reznikoff, and Oppen.

However, the first task of this project necessarily involves outlining the various intellectual and critical proposals that inform my own reading of, or reading as, Kindness. One of the primary intentions of this thesis is to advance a mode of scholarship that has at its heart an urge to intuit and which seeks freedoms from certain academic conventions, not in protest against but rather in the spirit of navigating a body of criticism that has amassed over the last hundred and fifty years. The foundation for this can be found in Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* (2003), which raises important ethical questions by employing quite alternative perspectives from queer theory in the context of modernist poetry, despite the obvious relevance for a poet like Stein. Ultimately, my intention is to reopen this modernist American moment to types of thinking that significantly differ from the legacy these poets have been largely considered to leave. In this sense Kindness, as I apply it to American modernist poetics seeks to continue the practice of departing from entrenched legacies by developing an alternative method of reading them.

Sedgwick sets the precedent for the type of gestural, reparative thinking that comprises my methodology by addressing the history of the "paranoid position." She discusses the inevitable disabling of any other critical ideology within the context of the "paranoid" academy and demonstrates how methods of reading that offer alternative perspectives to the "paranoid" are, by and large, dismissed as not only weak but incorrect and a waste of time, a state of affairs she convincingly decries. To clarify, by "paranoid" Sedgwick is referring to a state within the academy that only

allows for and endorses particular types of reading and critical analysis. Describing the critical context for such prohibitive attitudes to these alternative perspectives, she suggests that:

> it is not only important but *possible* to find ways of attending to such reparative motives and positionalities. The vocabulary for articulating any reader's reparative motive toward a text or a culture has long been so sappy, aestheticizing, defensive, anti-intellectual, or reactionary that it's no wonder few critics are willing to describe their acquaintance with such motives. The prohibitive problem, however, has been the limitations of present theoretical vocabularies rather than in the reparative motive itself.[24]

These dangers Sedgwick outlines should not be eschewed. In fact, it is my intention to provide a workable model for reading that will articulate the value of the "reparative motive" rather than dismiss it from the elitist perspective of the academy. This practice further lends itself to Objectivism, a movement that introduces further ethical and cultural values that help when considering American modernism within the context of the elitist perspective of its predecessor, Imagism. In reading Objectivist texts in terms of Kindness we might read the Objectivists not only as working in response to Imagism but this reading will allow us to consider American modernism in a different way than that afforded by the predecessor to Objectivism, Imagism. And in that context we can consider a developed readerly dialogue between the two movements. Kindness must combat the implicit accusation that as a "grammar of reading" it might be seen as "sappy, aestheticizing, defensive, anti-intellectual, or reactionary" in a context that seems predisposed to devalue a theory of compromise and pleasure. This introduction will explore the theoretical ideas and practices behind the reparative motive itself to show exactly how Kindness functions as a "grammar of reading".

Sedgwick discusses the vast majority of critical theory in terms of "Paranoia," responding to Paul Ricoeur's identification of the dominance of the "hermeneutics of suspicion".[25] She outlines "Paranoia" in terms of a psychoanalytic legacy, defining her position as being close to Melanie Klein's ideas of the "depressive position" as opposed to the "paranoid position". Sedgwick advocates a "reparative position" rather than the defensive, anticipatory one necessitated by the "paranoid position" and

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[24] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 150.
[25] Sedgwick, 122.

its attendant necessities.[26] Sedgwick also demonstrates how "Paranoia," as a "strong theory", inherently must dominate its subject epistemologically as its central premise is to prevent surprises, observing that this practice, or position, cultivates tautological arguments that ultimately prove only their own premise by virtue of their "paranoia" or urge to anticipate. For Sedgwick, "paranoia" has come to define the codes and practices of a lot of critical theory of the last century and consequently has come to represent and be understood as the *only* method or appropriate critical position from which to make a critical argument. She suggests that the idea that "paranoia" represents the only viable critical model is fundamentally untrue and unsupportable. She suggests that there are alternative theories to the "paranoid theory" (which seeks to argue points of "negative affect") that do not necessarily understand "strength" of argument or theory by those terms. The alternative she posits is Klein's "depressed position", which has the rarely esteemed task of positing "positive affect", a position that "inaugurates ethical possibility—in the form of a guilty, empathetic view of the other as at once good, damaged, integral, and requiring and eliciting love and care".[27] This statement is central to the ambitions of Kindness as a "grammar of reading". The thesis traverses many ethical and aesthetic moments throughout poetry but its centralizing locus is a transactional agenda of positive affect.

While ethics and aesthetics provide the foundations for my readings, the license to analyze these poets in such a manner derives from Sedgwick's queer theory, particularly her suggestion that we as thinkers:

> Allow each theory [paranoid and depressive] its own, different prime motive, at any rate—the anticipation of pain in one case, the provision of pleasure in the other—and neither can be called more realistic than the other. It's not even necessarily true that the two make different judgments of "reality": it isn't that one is pessimistic and sees the glass half empty, while the other is optimistic and sees the glass half full. In a world full of loss, pain, and oppression, both epistemologies are likely to be based on deep pessimism: the reparative motive of seeking pleasure [Kindness], after all, arrives, by Klein's account, only with the achievement of the depressive position. But what each looks for—which is again to say, the motive each has *for looking*—is bound to differ widely. Of the two, however, it is only paranoid knowledge that has so thorough a practice of disavowing its affective motive and force and masquerading as the very stuff of truth.[28]

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[26] Sedgwick, 128.
[27] Sedgwick, 137.
[28] Sedgwick, 138.

My "grammar of reading" here does not seek to produce an argument for a reading "masquerading as truth" rather it identifies Kindness as subjective, intimate moments that can be organized into a "grammar of reading". Reparative reading as mentioned above is discussed throughout this thesis in various ways, including Attridge's proposal of an anti-instrumental position as a pedagogically motivated ideology of reading, its appearance as anti-totalitarian ethics, the irresponsibility of the aesthetic position and naïveté in Woods and Bennett, and as the "*Beside*" in Sedgwick's own terms. Ultimately, it comprises a negotiation, a "grammar" that fundamentally does not seek a "truth" but rather explores and presents enjoyment in a reparative method that is characterized by Kindness.

Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* is crucial to the theoretical and methodological positions being outlined in this chapter and we both share an interest in Louise Rosenblatt's *The Reader, The Text, The Poem* for being definitional in our respective projects. Her idea of transaction explains a crucial feature of Kindness because it provides a specific understanding of the readerly process and experience based on an inherent exchange. My argument develops this idea by exploring how the stakes of the exchange are investigated and raised as part of the experimentalism of modernist poetics, which is of course germane in turn to Attridge's theory of the "singular". When Rosenblatt asserts that "The relationship between reader and text is not linear. It is a situation, an event at a particular time and place in which each element conditions the other", she is not only theorizing the poem as "event" but also laying the foundations for methods of understanding that resonate throughout contemporary critical theory today.[29]

The political theorist Bennett's readings of "vibrant materiality" and "thing-ness" not only resonate with my readings of Objectivism but, I would argue, with the practice of Objectivism itself. Retallack asserts that "the source of *vitality* for the essay is its engagement in conversational invention rather than ordinal accounts of things (including thoughts) that have already taken place".[30] This informs my understanding of Bennett's position in "Systems and Things: A Response to Graham Harman and Timothy Morton". Reading Whitman, she observes how:

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[29] Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (London: Feffer and Simons, 1978), 16.
[30] Retallack, 4.

Texts are bodies that can light up, by rendering human perception more acute, those bodies whose favored vehicle of affectivity is less wordy: plants, animals, blades of grass, household objects, trash. One of the stakes for me of the turn to things in contemporary theory is how it might help us live more sustainably, with less violence toward a variety of bodies. Poetry can help us feel more of the liveliness hidden in such things and reveal more of the threads of connection binding our fate to theirs.[31]

Although *Vibrant Matter* is not explicitly about literature, her methodology is designed to be transferable because she considers the poetic object and, crucially, the reading of poems to be an opportunity for liveliness, identifying the binding effect of the experience of reading as potential for sustainability and decreased violence. In short, Bennett values and reads objects and in doing so, values and reads poems too. The first chapter of *Vibrant Matter* recounts a morning walk in Baltimore. As she looks down into a grate over a storm drain and sees "one large men's plastic work glove/ one dense mat of oak pollen/one unblemished dead rat/one white plastic bottle cap/ one smooth stick of wood", she uses this instance of observation to discuss and extrapolate on the moment of a provocative "nameless awareness of the impossible singularity of [the objects/things before her]".[32] Becoming aware of a profound level of engagement that she feels with the image/objects she beholds, she identifies herself as a vibrant materialist. It is not necessarily her motives that I find so influential here but rather her methods of exploring the momentum of this moment. Developing this further, Bennett engages with both objects and event simultaneously to produce an aesthetic/ethical binding that reconciles the experience/event with the cause/object, or to phrase it in Sedgwick's terms, she creates a reparative moment:

When the materiality of the glove, the rat, the pollen, the bottle cap, and the stick started to shimmer and spark, it was in part because of the contingent tableau that they formed with each other, with the street, with the weather that morning, with me. For had the sun not glinted on the black glove, I might not have seen the rat; had the rat not been there, I might not have noted the bottle cap, and so on. But they *were* all there just as they were, and so I caught a glimpse of an energetic vitality inside each of these things, things that I generally conceived of as inert. In this assemblage, *objects* appeared as *things*, that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics. In my encounter

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[31] Jane Bennett, "Systems and Things: A Response to Graham Harman and Timothy Morton" in *New Literary History*, *New Literary History*, 43: 2 (Spring 2012), 232.
[32] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2010), 4.

> with the gutter on Cold Spring Lane, I glimpsed, a culture of things irreducible to the culture of objects. I achieved, for a moment, what Thoreau made his life's goal: to be able, as Thomas Dumm puts it, "to be surprised by what we see".[33]

This is an example of the type of thinking that I hope to expand upon in my own investigations of the Objectivists and the "legacy" of Imagism. A similar preparedness to encounter or experience is part of the central ambitions of Sedgewick's *Touching Feeling* as the text pursues nondualistic thought with a view to the pedagogical implications or freedoms of nondualism. She writes of her reader and her project, "the ideal I'm envisioning here is a mind receptive to thoughts, able to nurture and connect them, and susceptible to happiness in their entertainment".[34] The act of walking, where chance observations provide material for transcendent moments, resonates with the poetics and the philosophy of Reznikoff's practice specifically but also with the ideological bases of Objectivism more generally. Bennett's method also explains why Stein is positioned at the beginning of my analysis, since she sets out certain essential features of Kindness. Stein's profound engagement with the poem as a semantic object as opposed to the *thing*/event object as poem, or text is why I begin my close readings with Stein, so as to reinforce the centrality of the notion of the poem as event/object to Kindness and thereby read Stein in terms of what Kindness is not. This reading of Stein finds its basis in, but ultimately departs from, Marjorie Perloff's correlating of Stein and Wittgenstein through the notion of "language games" as a precedence for Language poetics. Stein's work shows how the writer's presence is fundamentally and loudly present in the ontological affect of her writing. We might say that there is an inherent "paranoia" (an urge to prevent bad surprises that might result from disambiguation) in her production of poems as "negative affect" (a pursuit of expression through compromised terms). However, her vociferousness as a "present" writer is in direct contrast to Pound's ideology of the image. Hers is an encompassing presence wrought from the ideological pursuit to remove the poet from the poem quite unlike Pound's or indeed Williams, as we will see, and different to Zukofsky, Reznikoff, and Oppen in more complicated ways.

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[33] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 5.
[34] Sedgwick, 1.

Contemporary writing on the Objectivists is moving toward an understanding of the Objectivist project that resonates with my own thinking on the ideas that Bennett espouses. Most recently, Ruth Jennison's *The Zukofsky Era* (2012) provides a materialist account of the spatial and commodity negotiations of the Objectivists as second wave, and consequently more politically radical and diffuse, modernists. She uses Huyssen's *After the Great Divide* (1986) to locate the Objectivists as they span the 20s and the Depression era and address the increasing contact these decades brought about between high and low culture. Jennison's book makes a compelling reading of Zukofsky, Oppen and Lorine Niedecker within a richly formulated understanding of the Objectivists as radical, immigrant, leftist, Marxist or Feminist writers who are engaged in negotiations of "uneven development" and commodity fetishism within unprecedented experiences of American modernity.[35] Moreover, Jennison's close readings lead her to propose a central contention about Objectivist practice, arguing that parataxis is the device by which the Objectivists present their modified modernisms. Her argument enriches my own notions of Kindness as a "grammar of reading" since parataxis as a positional, structural, strategy explores the poetic implications of placing side by side. This resonates with Bennett's writing on the "thingness" and "vibrant materiality" she encountered at the storm drain in Baltimore:

> Parataxis, […] is the formal deployment of radical agency, wherein discrete particulars are placed side by side; […] paratactical construction is the signature strategy of Objectivism. Through parataxis, Objectivists investigate the correspondences, connections, and asymmetries between the historically distant and socially distinct particulars that their poems arrange. In doing so, Objectivists defamiliarize the cultural particulars they call upon; paratactical

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[35] The relationship between the Imagists and the Objectivists is a major consideration for this thesis. Jennison, in accordance with and developing on newer modernist studies' perspectives, reconsiders the until recently central idea—most commonly associated with Hugh Kenner—that the Objectivists were only ever working within an Imagist legacy to which they added very little. Rather, Jennison argues that the Objectivists "expropriate" the Imagist legacy in the cause of addressing more left wing, socially conscious problems and ideologies. The sense of expropriation can be seen to resonate with Bennett's entire methodology in *Vibrant Matter*, in the sense that she applies philosophical positions to environmental and personal politics with the intention of advancing a more sensitized, fruitful understanding of the systems by which we, the human race, live. Addressing the notion of Objectivism within the Imagist legacy, Jennison argues that "the Objectivists of the Zukofsky Era inherit the first generation's experimentalist break with prior systems of representation, and they strive to adequate this break to a futurally pointed content of revolutionary politics. To this end, these poets expropriate the formal tools of first-generation modernists and use them to announce a rupture not with the past but into the future." Ruth Jennison, *The Zukofsky Era: Modernity, Margins, and the Avant-Garde* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 9.

form throws into relief the historical and material specificity of each particular against that of its neighbour.[36]

If we consider Attridge's notion of the appearance of the "other" within the "same" as defining "singularity" in literature, we could argue that parataxis, according to Jennison, is the Objectivist method for achieving "singularity". However, Kindness as a "grammar of reading" has an alternative focus to Jennison's political negotiations. For my purposes, Bennett's "vibrant materiality" lends itself well to an understanding of parataxis since it can be developed to consider notions of moment, and of encounter with the poem as object/event through reparative reading. "Cultural particulars" and things/objects can be "vibrant" in reading. In this way I work tangentially to Jennison, who produces a brilliant argument for re-understanding the ethical in the aesthetic of the Objectivists. The combination of the ethical and aesthetic in my argument is significant because while Kindness as a "grammar of reading" shares Jennison's position on the political and aesthetic legacies that Objectivism addresses, it is primarily concerned with reading to define moments of salient connection between the Imagist and the Objectivist production in a period prior to that addressed in her study so that equal attention can be given to Reznikoff *and* Oppen.

Jennison's argument concerning the differences between the Imagists and the Objectivists serves to illustrate a theoretical distinction that I pursue through my close readings. The attendant moments of distinction Jennison proposes are instrumental to how I figure the aesthetic/ethical distinctions in my consideration of the Imagist – Objectivist arc. As she explains:

> Where Imagism had drawn a nimbus around the data of lived experience and called it a particular, Objectivism seeks to reveal that immediacy is itself a formal mediation of historical developments that predate its appearance.[37]

Once again, this description of the Objectivist strategy resonates with Bennett's argument in *Vibrant Matter*, where the apprehension of lively matter can be seen as the reading of an "explanatory structure" (to use Sedgwick's term) that "seeks to reveal that immediacy is itself a formal mediation." When Bennett remembers the sun

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[36] Jennison, 3.
[37] Jennison, 4.

glinting off the workman's glove she speaks not only to the singularity of the event of "alterity"—the poem—but also, for my purposes, recalls the anecdotal beginning of Rosenblatt's *The Reader, the Text, The Poem* in which she invites the reader to:

> visualize a little scene: on a darkened stage I see the figures of the author and the reader, with the book—the text of the poem or play or novel—between them. The spotlight focuses on one of them so brightly that the others fade into practical invisibility.[38]

Rosenblatt is sketching out her apprehension of the critical tendency to overlook the reader in the poetic exchange. The glimmer of sunshine that invites Bennett into a moment of vital materiality is akin to the spotlight of critical attention that Rosenblatt describes as both seek to illuminate some part of the transaction between text/object/thing and the reader/human/experience.[39] However, Bennett seems to be suggesting an alternative illuminated subject, the transaction itself, that which binds or is, better still, the moment of binding. In this context, Kindness provides a "grammar of reading" that binds the poet, the poem and the reader together to illuminate object-event-word transactions and, consequently, combine the aesthetic with the ethical. Both Kindness and moments of vital materiality are contingent.

Bennett concludes her study with Thoreau, citing Thoreau's notion of the "Wild" as providing a root for her own proposal of vital materialism in addition to invoking Spinoza's *Conatus* and Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*. The allusion to the Transcendentalist tradition is not incidental to this introduction and it will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5 as a specifically American relationship of reciprocity that had its own political agenda. The naïveté of Emerson's transparent eyeball is a vital consideration for the Objectivists but not so much, I would argue, for the Imagists, thus providing an example of the question of "American-ness" raised by tracing an arc between Stein and Reznikoff. Bennett's phrase "irreducible to the culture of objects"[40] suggests something akin to Zukofsky's "Sincerity and Objectification". Tim Woods identifies this combination of the sincere and the

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[38] Rosenblatt, 1.
[39] This transactional understanding is echoed in Charles Olson's essay "Projective Verse" (1950). He uses the term "Kinetics" to describe what Bennett would call "vibrant materiality" and posits the poem as a transaction of energy in support of this term: "(1) the *kinetics* of the thing [6]. A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader." Charles Olson, *Projective Verse*, (New York: Totem Press, 1959), 3.
[40] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 5.

objective as the reason for the perceived nascent naïveté in Objectivism. This is also a crucial methodological consideration for Bennett when she cites Adorno in her discussion of the merits of methodological naïveté. As a result, naïveté functions in more than one way in this thesis. This variety around "naivete" is developed around Woods's theories about the naivete in placing "sincerity" and "objectification" side by side and to this point in terms of the parataxis that Jennison observes. Additionally, there is the ethical position informing Kindness as a "grammar of reading" as informed by Bennett's, Sedgwick's, DuPlessis's, and, to some extent, Attridge's methodologies. I am reading "naiveté" as central to a discourse on Kindness that finds its roots in a consideration of Sedgwick's "depressed position" and Bennett's discussion of its (naïveté's) critical potential. The notion of naivete also resonates with Rosenblatt's reader theory, and in this sense can be seen to provide a space for a consideration of naivete as in part a key component of Kindness as a "grammar of reading". Woods discusses one aspect of naïveté and Attridge wants to achieve another, although he does not really allow himself to. However, in a very real sense naïveté is central to the way Attridge advocates for "singularity" as theorized by an encounter with the "other" or rather "alterity".

Bennett identifies the crisis at the heart of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* as the implicit rage that Western thought engenders and suffers as a result of not being able to reconcile or address the space between "concept and reality, object and thing".[41] This is an opinion echoed in Sedgwick's theorizing of the "paranoid" position and her pursuit of an alternative perspective. Bennett discusses Adorno's concept of "nonidentity" as the route of a pedagogic methodology with which to address and ameliorate that rage. It is worth noting here that while Rosenblatt's oeuvre is ostensibly concerned with pedagogical theories there is a perhaps latent practicality to her theories that serve as in important influence on Kindness as a practiced "grammar of reading". Bennett's work embraces a quality of naïveté as the best means of addressing the concept of nonidentity, suggesting in her preface that "What seems to be needed is a certain willingness to appear naïve or foolish, to affirm what Adorno called his 'clownish traits'".[42] She explores the virtues of a certain naïveté in critical work on vibrant materialism, even suggesting that naïveté can be an advantage for a vital materialist: "There is something to be said for moments of methodological

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[41] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 13.
[42] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, xiii.

naïveté, for the postponement of a genealogical critique of objects. This delay might render manifest a subsistent world of nonhuman vitality. To "render manifest" is both to receive and to participate in the shape given to that which is received".[43] Kindness, in its critical capacity, is interested in the readerly act of "render[ing] manifest" a recognition of the imbrication of aesthetics and ethics so that the poems examined in this thesis provide moments analogous to Bennett's before the grate in Baltimore.

Overall, I must acknowledge that on some level this thesis represents an implicit desire to react against the scholarly responsibility to structural academic legacies, a call to suspend the hierarchy of critical thought which chimes with complete aestheticism. This is not to devalue the academy, nor is it meant to renounce the effects of a culture of ideas that come to shape one's values, be they readerly or otherwise. On the contrary, it is through a consideration of Kindness that we can appreciate how the lack of a certain form of knowledge does not necessarily devalue the act of reading. Furthermore, as Bennett suggests, this instance of naïveté allows for the suspension of the epistemological "paranoid" dialogue that might be beneficial, indeed even reparative. This type of reading resonates with an aesthetic ideology of art that does not need to be ethical or responsible, in that it is not concerned with anticipating a bad surprise, such as a failure of knowledge, in any "paranoid" sense. The extent to which this resonance is effective is limited to the idea that a reader should not *have* to be academically responsible in order to have access to literature. While the university as an institution aims explicitly to produce responsible readers as Sedgwick observes, "paranoia is nothing if not teachable" part of the problem for Kindness is that it will fail if it does not acknowledge its own responsibilities.[44] However, the "grammar of reading" that I aim to explore seeks to renegotiate this imperative in modernist American poetry in order to engage with an aesthetic tradition that since its origin has tried to separate itself from ethical considerations. This is the reason for beginning with Rosenblatt, a theorist who writes with a problematised view of the literary theories bound up in New Criticism. She expresses reservations about the New Criticism's dogmatic privileging of the text due to in particular, her interest in a theory that instead prioritizes the reader. Rosenblatt observes that in its "quest for 'the poem itself'" and the fierce disassociation of the poet from the poem, New Criticism "tended to focus on explication, elaborate formal

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[43] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 17.
[44] Sedgwick, 136.

analysis, and discussion of the technique of the poem, viewed as an autonomous object. The author having been eliminated, the reader too, was expected to approximate the impersonal transparency of the scientist"[45]. Part of what Rosenblatt identifies here is a problematic result of New Criticism that can also be applied to Pound's Imagist modernism since the reader's task is to approximate the impersonal in order to grasp a "scientific" notion that is only affirmed as scientific through its own aesthetics. Though this observation leads Rosenblatt to discuss poems as events, my intention is also to read them more readily as event/objects so that reading itself can be regarded as personal and autonomous. It is important, therefore, to outline the function of and the purpose behind this aesthetic tradition.

The New Criticism of the 1940s, with its emphasis on close reading and formalism, has been seen by critics, such as Terry Eagleton for example, as an extension of turn of the century Aestheticism. Aestheticism has also been fascinatingly reclaimed as a methodology, as Sarah Garland points out, it "is not the sickly child of solipsism, it is a way of experiencing everything else".[46] Similarly, Robert Archambeau begins his essay on Language poets, "The Aesthetic Anxiety", with an assertion that echoes Garland's writing on Barthes, Sontag and the aesthetic legacy, where she argues that "From a writer's point of view, the erasure with a trace [that Barthes theorizes] in "The Death of the Author" is, as Barthes knows, having your cake and eating it".[47] Archambeau starts by asserting that his thesis essentially boils down to the observation that "poets want to have their cake and eat it too".[48] This phrase, tantalizingly repeated between these two essays, characterizes contemporary attitudes to the functions and ambitions of Aestheticism, not to mention how it also articulates the tension inherent in artistic creation within the "paranoid" position. Both writers suggest that what Aestheticism seems to permit – an alleviation of responsibility for creation, or, for our purposes, the examination of the "essence" of a work that holds no truck with an ethics of creation or production – is an artistic fantasy and in turn a critical impossibility. There is an oxymoronic quality to this

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[45] Rosenblatt, 103.

[46] Sarah Garland, "'This temptation to be undone…' Sontag, Barthes, and the Uses of Style", in *Art and Life in Aestheticism: De-Humanizing and Re-Humanizing Art, the Artist and the Artistic Receptor*, ed. by Kelly Comfort (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 189-208, 205.

[47] Garland, "'This temptation to be undone…'", in *Art and Life in Aestheticism*, ed. by Kelly Comfort, 189-208, 196.

[48] Robert Archambeau, "The Aesthetic Anxiety: Avant-Garde Poetics, Autonomous Aesthetics, and the Idea of Politics", in *Art and Life in Aestheticism*, ed. by Kelly Comfort, 139-159, 139.

proposal resulting from modern understandings of the word "have", something that both Garland and Archambeau clearly utilize.  The expression demonstrates an ethical position that, by Marxist standards, talks to power, privilege, and property. The expression can be read as proposing something of an ethical imperative to take responsibility for authorship/ownership. In this context of critical thought on Aestheticism, as seen in both Garland and Archambeau's writings, the phrase represents the critically impossible but nevertheless tempting quality of the Aesthetic position. Developing upon this, my argument is born, in part, out of the critically conflicted desire to have one's cake and to eat it, that is, it negotiates the desire to accept the poems it analyses as they are, in Kind and naïve terms. It also affirms the aesthetic position, and the need to read these Kind and naïve terms back into an ethical set of affective relations that bring the poetic and the object worlds back together by mobilizing Kindness as a reading practice.

Ultimately, I advocate an ethically responsible impossibility that is borne out of an ethical imperative which confirms that you can't have your cake and eat it. In important ways, the aims of this thesis derive from a problematic sense of the intellectual, or maybe more specifically, the academic/"paranoid" binary that such a phrase supports. An idea that academic "haves", as opposed to "have-nots", structure an exclusionary elitism constantly troubles my argument but the anti-instrumentalism that fundamentally motivates it is engaged in addressing the inherent problem within this binary. This is of course an ethically charged position, in addition to being inflected by the left-wing ideologies of the Objectivist movement. The question arises therefore: why bring an aesthetic debate to bear on a movement that seems to be anti-aesthetic? Moreover, how does this differ from other contemporary approaches that seek to redefine the aesthetic expressions of the Objectivist movement in ethical terms like Woods or Jennsion's work? The value and difference of my approach, I would suggest, is that through a lens of Kindness we can examine Pound, Reznikoff, Oppen, Williams and Zukofsky in an aesthetic/formalist manner with the intention of finding an affinity—a kinship—that is not merely chronological or circumstantial, while also managing to avoid the historical readings of the two movements by re-inscribing a "grammar of reading" from the position of Kindness. The powers of the Imagist aesthetic in the context of Objectivist ethics seems to me to invite a reading informed by Kindness, thus posing an aesthetic question mediated by ethics, that, to a large extent, Bennett's notion of vital materialism makes possible.

## **Critical context and ethical position**

Anti-instrumentalism and a profound suspicion of literary-theoretical, and by that token political, totalitarianism are two of the primary tendencies motivating this thesis. While Bennett is crucial to these ideas, Attridge's *The Singularity of Literature* alongside Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* also provide useful explorations of alternative modes of reading and "understanding" in their critical re-imaginings of the responsibility of academic thinking and engagement. My approach has always been governed by a pronounced interest in the "failures of understanding" that seem to give rise to a certain sense of academic irrelevance and the personal responses these elicit because they often point to a space between, or rather a space *for*, a type of reading that spans the ethical and the aesthetic as established by Woods, Nicholls, Jennison, Quartermain, and, of course, Retallack in her notion of "the poethical wager". Within these discourses I observe the positive potential for reparative readings that address questions of modernist aesthetic and ethical positions from a perspective that wants to re-imagine modes of engagement once again. Concentrating on the readerly experience presents it as a resolution to those academic modes that seek to exclude readers from the very texts that they aim to enlighten.

Woods's seminal work on Zukofsky's *A* is immeasurably useful for negotiating the different proposals of the ethical and aesthetic debates without devaluing either. Recent thinking on the aesthetic tradition, in particular Garland's work on Barthes and the aesthetic legacy as a product of, or indeed manifest in, "The Death of the Author", has further enabled me to critically assess my own examinations in terms of the ethical implications of aestheticism. As I originally conceived of it, Kindness belonged to a formalist tradition that I adapted as a means of valuing reading and readerly experience. This seemed to be logical since it followed on from the Aesthetic tradition that emerges as New Criticism's focused attention to the poem in total. In this sense, Kindness can be seen in part as an extension of formalist reading practices while also developing as a critical response to these practices, as they are embodied by New Critical pedagogies. Engaging with New Criticism using Kindness is vital since its pedagogical practices provided the context within which Poundian modes of modernism found their second and most influential interpretation. However, the formalism implicit in New Critical modes of

enquiry, like that in Kindness, cannot exist in a vacuum, therefore, Kindness must be understood as a "grammar of reading" rather than just another label readers can use to hide from the ethical implications of their interpretations. Woods's reclamation of Zukofsky from the formalist grip of New Criticism is crucial here and sets the precedent for my own attempt to reclaim Objectivism from formalism, especially since recent re-readings of Aestheticism as offered by Garland and Archambeau highlight the inherent rhetorical and academic failings of such reading methods within a "paranoid" framework. As Archambeau asserts, the indefensibility of the Aesthetic position "is not so much argued as it is asserted, and like many un-argued assertions, it can be understood as an idea clung to less for its verifiability than for the way it seems to eliminate contradictions too painful to confront".[49] This statement also relates to the problematics Sedgwick anticipates when discussing the depressed position's urge to assert positive affect. However, since I also contend that Attridge's position regarding the instrumentalism of the academy has validity, my argument seeks to strike a balance between the apparent, or rather assumed, freedoms that aestheticism promotes and the ethics it belies.

As a "grammar of reading", Kindness must address the issue of what the aesthete would call "autonomy", a topic widely contested by twentieth century theorists such as Adorno, Levinas, Derrida, and Barthes, to name a selection. Because of the "paranoid" position, any reader or writer today must understand the notion of autonomy as being in some part synonymous with an inherently compromised sense of ethics. This is exemplified in an analysis of Zukofsky in Chapter 3 in which I discuss a painting by the English Pre-Raphaelite painter John Everett Millais in conjunction with one of the poet's earlier poems. Ostensibly, the reason for interrelating these two very anomalous art works is anti-Semitism, but I would argue that the link is much more critically charged than that. By exploring the resonances of the anti-Semitism in the Victorian English reception of Millais' painting, I identify a consistent problem that in itself motivates my own critical work around Aestheticism—the unavoidable intrusion of the ethical upon the aesthetic. This instance of reparative reading is also an example of reparative thinking that seeks to assert a positive affect in thought. By referring to the historically totalizing effect of morality in the reception of aesthetic work and the compromised condition of the

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[49] Archambeau, "The Aesthetic Anxiety", in *Art and Life in Aestheticism*, ed. by Kelly Comfort, 139-159, 143.

aesthetic object itself, I will show how this is a condition pervading Imagist and Objectivist poetics. Consider Williams's "To Elsie" as a preliminary example:

> …some Elsie—
> voluptuous water
> expressing with broken brain
>
> the truth about us—
> her great
> ungainly hips and flopping breasts
>
> addressed to cheap
> jewelry
> and rich young men with fine eyes
>
> as if the earth under our feet
> were
> an excrement of  some sky[50]

In this poem we can see a moralising aesthetic that intrudes on the poem, indeed intrudes on the body. The unattractive spread of the female body appears to present an "objective correlative" or provide "sincerity" to the object as lacking, a failed person in a constellation that could not accommodate her. The ethics inherent in the aesthetic flopping breasts animate the poem, thus displaying a certain "behaviour" in the form of a rather grotesque sneer.  In "Whistler, an American", the state of affairs that makes Millais's painting so provocative as to cause religious offense is decried and it is from this Victorian melodrama of artistic and social tensions that aestheticism was born[51]. This is not a new critical awareness but it does structure the conditions under which I construct Kindness as a "grammar of reading" aimed at understanding "autonomy" in reading. The ethical problems that autonomy presents for reading will be addressed but this requires a way of thinking that makes the personal permissible. As a result, Attridge's, Bennett's and Sedgwick's critical positions will be shown to make Kindness possible, where the personal can be seen as perhaps filling in, in a far less ethically and politically compromised fashion, for autonomy itself.

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[50] William Carlos Williams, *Imaginations: Kora in Hell, Spring and All, The Great American Novel, The Descent of Winter, A Novelette and Other Prose,* ed. and intro. by Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1970), 132.

[51] Granted Millais's painting was produced roughly 40 years prior to Whistler's lecture but Whistler was known to associate with the Pre-Raphaelites and this 40 year gap can be seen to articulate further stagnation of the Victorian scene, or indeed the absorption of certain members of the once radical fraternity into the establishment itself.  In fact, Millais was knighted in 1885, the same year that Whistler gave his address.

Attridge defines his key term "Singularity" as a readerly *event* that "arises from the work's constitution as *a set of active relations*, put in play in the reading, that never settle into a fixed configuration".[52] From the outset, he means to write a text of literary theory that is "accessible" by addressing the palimpsestic quality that centuries of critical theory bring to bear on any academic text.[53] His aim is to avoid this by engaging with his ideas and with his readers in a way that is, to repeat, "accessible". Such an approach fundamentally differs from Sedgwick's in that he cannot step outside of the codes of thinking that bring him to his conclusions and then express them tautologically. Inherent in Attridge's argument for the accessible are a couple of antagonistic points directed toward academic production. First, how instrumentalism as that practice which seeks to put texts to work is destructive regarding academic creativity and, second, that the pursuit of the "literary" as a quality of New Criticism's preoccupation with theory creates mostly a decreasing circle of fashionable criticism that both reflects and reinforces the canon. Therefore, "instrumentality" utilizes literature as a means by which to test or prove other theories. According to Attridge, New Criticism and instrumentalism have combined in recent years to exert a pressure on the academic product that inhibits academic development, meaning fewer critical risks are taken. In this sense, he appears to approach a form of "autonomy" that might, in fact, release the reader from critical theory itself by working against the totalizing obfuscation of theory. That said, Attridge by no means disavows his theoretical lineage, he merely places most of his methodology in the appendix of his text, in "Debts and Directions". This decision has a political agenda in that it aims to remove the first hurdle of engagement with critical theory that an interested, but perhaps not initiated, reader may encounter—the exclusionary quality of philosophical methodologies that explain to the initiate the theoretical debts of the work and simultaneously discourage an un-inducted reader who might simply seek illumination or a different perspective. This apparently usurped academic tradition is obviously anti-autonomous in the aesthetic sense but whether or not it is entirely ethical is debatable.

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[52] Derek Attridge, *The Singularity of Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), 68.

[53] "My aim has been to write as accessible a work as possible, and I have therefore resisted the temptation to identify precursors and allies, engage in polemic, and situate my thinking in the various debates that have churned around the topic for a very long time. Instead, I have added a short appendix in which I try to be explicit about my major intellectual debts and to point out avenues for further reading." Attridge, xi.

Attridge does not seek to undermine but rather to re-evaluate accepted modes of critical thinking. He is very clear that, in part, his motivation for producing *The Singularity of Literature* is his frustration with what he perceives to be an overwhelming tide of instrumentalism as the defining motivation behind the majority of contemporary literary criticism. Bound up with this frustration is the implicit rejection of the separation of form and content or meaning, which he describes as fundamental to the aesthetic tradition within literary criticism. He cannot build his argument without the fundamental assertion that "form and meaning both happen and they are part of the same happening".[54] With this assertion, Attridge confirms a contemporary understanding of ethics and aesthetics that corresponds with the work of critics like Woods, as both refer to Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* in making this assertion. It is worth noting that this notion is central to post World War II American poetics also, perhaps most explicitly in Olson's essay "Projective Verse", when he quotes Robert Creeley in block capitals: "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT".[55] In the context of delineating an expressly American poetics, then, Attridge's observation has a peculiar and important traction. Attridge's work on the shape of the academy also offers an alternative to the idea that the value inherent in reading poetry, indeed in literary criticism entirely, is that which illuminates something other than the poem itself, (the paranoid position). His argument seeks to actively avoid what he perceives to be an insular and exclusionary trend in contemporary accepted modes of the discipline. In this sense, he appears to echo Sontag's 50-year-old rallying cry in *Against Interpretation*. However, Attridge repeatedly concedes to the essential quality of academic leg-work and while he does explicitly anchor his theories to their often philosophical sources at times, he is *never* suggesting that one might simply produce academic work without the academy in mind. Attridge clearly asserts that he does not produce his work with the intention of advancing a "new way of doing literary criticism".[56]

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[54] Attridge, 114.

[55] Olson, 4.

[56] Attridge, 100. It is worth noting that there is a fair amount of criticism of the poets that I study that is not circumscribed by New Criticism, including but obviously not limited to Woods and Jennison. Also the works of poet-critics like Olson and Retallack also offer alternative rubrics by which to read the Objectivists and in doing so encourage my own attempt to advance a new, albeit academically acceptable, method of reading or "doing literary criticism" that benefits from the "grammar of reading" advanced by Kindness.

Attridge's scholarly method is to tease at an idea, to investigate his own meaning as he deploys his terms systematically throughout the text. Rather than close reading he instead presents a fairly abstract system as a means of re-understanding accepted critical theories of reading and uses his investigations to present a complete theory that centres on his definition of "Singularity" in literature as an event or experience of reading (including writing) that is original. He writes the "other" into the sphere of the same through inventiveness; using the means of the "same" in unexpected ways to produce an experience of "alterity" and/or the "other" in a text. This inventiveness is attributed to creativity, which is the source of the nature of event-ness that makes the literary literature. Crucial to Attridge's understanding and development of the "other" is that the "other" can be read as epitomizing or indeed representing creation, or authentic creative production, in that the "other" arrives from the outside through creativity. This "other" is necessarily the product of its context in every sense and its creator is mysterious creativity. The unknowable nature of creativity, for Attridge, is made manifest in the "other" quality of literature, where ideas of "alterity" and the "other" respond to "autonomy" as relating to the "unknowable" quality inherent in, or structurally necessary to, autonomy. Ultimately, therefore Attridge's concept of "singularity" provides a means by which to address autonomy and ethics in the same breath.

Attridge takes care to differentiate between the inventiveness of non-literary works that produce originality (scientific/historical papers for example) and literary works (poetry and fiction). This method of distinction, defining that which is not "singular", is central to his method. However, Attridge's own work is very much a product of that which he is outlining, namely, his conception of inventiveness as using the same to introduce the "other".[57] Part of his theory is premised on the notion of the individual "ideoculture", a term purporting to delineate the individual's cultural sphere of knowledge and understanding that, he argues, is the ground of how we participate with culture at large and yet remain, as individuals, infinitely multi-various

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[57] Perhaps one way to attempt to distill Attridge's distinction between factual inventiveness and creative inventiveness circles around the notion of encounter itself. That is to say, the factual singular invites the "other" into the same whereas the creative singular brings about an encounter with the "other" and this is the root of Attridge's assertion that the singular creative – in literature – is best defined as an event that is on going and infinitely repeatable as long as it is read. Attridge would add to this that singularity is of course dependent on the temporal period of its production i.e. it must necessarily be a product of its time. That, however, is not the primary lens through which Attridge proposes his theory of reading singularity.

and nuanced in our perceptions within the wider, agreed upon, group.[58] This position begins the discussion through which this thesis engages with ethics and its attendant ideas of certainty and communication. If we accept the ideoculture as a means of defining difference in any reader, and bear this in mind throughout, then we might begin to produce something approaching a formula for reading Kindness in poetry and produce a new "grammar of reading" that will inform the procedures of the reading that the thesis proposes.

Kindness does not purport to replace ethics, rather it seeks, as a "grammar of reading", to re-inscribe some of the issues that ethics presents. Even more so, it seeks to set out a system of possibilities that guide the readerly experience towards a certain type of reflective understanding of the experience itself, thus posing the question about the conditions of reading in exile: how can we propose a "grammar of reading" that does not exclude twentieth-century debates and dialectics but does not require that the neophyte must be versed in them in order to engage in reading poetry? This is where the theory, or rather the "grammar", reverts to the problematic idea of autonomy by seeking to embrace a sense of the personal or subjective over a notion of "autonomy", consequently making "behaviour" an important consideration. Attridge is clear that he wishes to redefine the question at the heart –as he sees it- of contemporary literary criticism. He means to ask of literary criticism itself how best to perform a text's engagements with linguistic power. Sontag's *Against Interpretation* helps indicate the case for an internalized academic self-reflection since she understands the value of theorizing the ideoculture of the individual and also presents the determination to engage legitimate methods for understanding a critical approach with the aim of re-determining the goal of criticism itself. Both Sontag and Attridge, therefore, signal an intent to shift toward a more critical practice that moves away from establishing meaning and towards theorizing not artistic method precisely but, to use Attridge's term, the "event" of literature and the negotiations that comprise it. As Sontag explains:

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[58] The term "ideogram" itself clearly has resonances with Pound's work on Ernest Fenollosa's writings on the Chinese Ideogram, where Pound relies on his certainty that "red" is something everyone "KNOWS"— However, Pound does not make the distinction that is so crucial to Attridge's argument that everyone has a different sphere of culture, ideologies and references- hence "ideoculture". Pound's ideology of "ideo" hinges on the linear assumption that everyone must have the same "ideoculture" to use Attridge's term. This gestures toward a problematics that will be crucial to my reading of Pound's early work.

> The aim of all commentary on art should now be to make works of art—and, by analogy, our own experience—more, rather than less, real to us. The function of criticism should be to show how it is what it is, even that it is what it is, rather than to show what it means.[59]

To demonstrate the practice he advocates of treating the poem as an event, Attridge writes on the singularity of George Herbert's poem "Easter 1 or 2", in turn disrobing the text in a fashion typical of close reading by pointing out the formal and meaningful turns in the four lines he quotes. He develops this reading further by attempting to stand outside the poem itself to consider the significance of the act or the event of the poem and in doing so highlight the "singularity" of the poem itself. For Attridge, the poem does all of the above traditional acrobatics of literature, which contribute to the "singularity" and creativity of the poem. It is, in his reading, an event that affects these crucial developments in the reader's experience but these effects can no longer represent the only action of the poem itself:

> It is also, at the same time, *to be made aware of language's power to do all these things*, to be made conscious of their happening as a complex linguistic (but also, and inseparably, a conceptual, emotional, and physical) event. For a moment, the reader who undergoes all this experiences a miracle, and experiences it as a miracle in language. [Attridge's emphases][60]

Clearly we are moving towards Pound's notion of a poetic image providing an "emotional complex in an instant of time".[61] Pound's work on the "ideogram", however, is informed by his totalitarian ethics– a subject that will be addressed in this thesis, the ideogram however at least, superficially, for the moment has the look of Attridge's understanding of ideoculture. The key difference is that Attridge recognizes both the multiplicity of experiences within the single reader and the infinite multiplicity of readers, whereas Pound articulates a sameness of understanding by demonstrating multiplicity solely within a poetic object. Regardless of this distinction, however, both make their varied points in terms of aesthetics.

Attridge asserts that in order to perform a literary reading of Herbert and then, by extension, other literature, the reader must enact "a certain suspension of questions

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[59] Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (London: Penguin, 2009), 14.
[60] Attridge, 99.
[61] Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound,* 4.

of truth, of morality, of history".[62]   Nevertheless, readerly aesthetic autonomy represents an obstacle to the apprehension of originality, thus revealing the fundamental flaw in ideas of aesthetic autonomy and its critical legacy. This is because the implications of aesthetic autonomy necessarily avoid ethical considerations, as the "suspension" that Attridge discusses posits a form of production and apprehension that occurs in an ethical bubble that frankly cannot exist.  This means that there is a fundamental flaw to any argument that in its "autonomy" as aesthetic object, the poem presents its ignorance as a strength, the result being an argument that attempts to assuage those "contradictions too painful to confront"[63]. However, this problematised notion of autonomy presents a very important question this thesis hopes to address in some capacity at least: what if ignorance of a given idea is an accident?[64] Presumably, this condition of ignorance, accidental or otherwise, must result in the dismissal of any resultant thought. Spinoza calls ideas produced through ignorance "falsity". Part of my argument for Kindness is based upon the notion that this type of thinking seems like an ethical miss-step that strays towards a totalizing hierarchy of potential readers. As a foil to the improbability of a naïve apprehension of originality, Attridge posits "inventiveness" as a critical currency that the naïve reader can have access to, if only briefly and ultimately frustratedly. This differs from the earlier point of Bennett's, as rather than accommodating or even celebrating the potential that naïveté presents, Attridge compensates for naïveté by offering an alternative rubric by which to value reading. While "originality" represents new possibilities produced by an artwork *in* its given context, "inventiveness" is a quality that is present whenever it is encountered by a reader. This quality, the capacity to discern inventiveness, goes some way towards asserting the value of the reader or the reading, which indicates where the similarities with Kindness can be seen. This is mediated by Bennett's assertions that for a little while anyway, naïveté itself can be valuable. Kindness does not depend on naïveté—

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[62] Attridge, 100.
[63] Archambeau, 143.
[64] This notion of "accidental ignorance" is the thin end of a wedge that, I would be very keen to explore in terms of how we value readers. For example, how might a dyslexic be able to engage in an academic discourse if his or her own structure of perception fundamentally alters his or her capacity to engage in the terms of academic discourse. Or indeed how can the academy accommodate the dyslexic if his or her disability might render his or her method of reading, or style of work impractical for academic consideration. It seems to be a question that should be addressed more thoroughly than with subsidized computer equipment and extra help with grammar. Perhaps further work on Kindness might begin to consider a school of thought that values the scholarly work of those who do not necessarily find the academy accessible or inviting to them.

because even this position is dualistic and problematic. It is meant to offer a "grammar of reading" that accommodates all ideocultures engaging in moments in which the aesthetic and the ethical are bound together in the reading experience.

Kindness, however, is not limited to the autonomous/personal. If it were, it need not or could not critically exist in real terms. That is to say, if Kindness exclusively advocates for an unquestioned autonomous/personal readerly experience it would serve eventually to shut down the discussion it means to develop. Everyone would just read poems and feel no need to explore, discuss or produce their responses; we would just sit quietly and read. Attridge, on the other hand, allows for internalized historical knowledge to inform his readings yet still resisting the idea that the enjoyment of reading is contingent on contextual knowledge, "The enjoyment of art has never been the sole preserve of the historian."[65] This assertion further aligns him with Sedgwick's ideas about valuing pleasure as a legitimate product of reading and approaches the shift mentioned earlier from the autonomous to the personal. In addition, he also attempts momentarily to account for a dismantling of the hierarchy that Sedgwick puts into motion when she writes about the critical position "Beside" by asserting that he or I or you as a reader cannot be mistaken about inventiveness in a text because inventiveness is "always inventiveness *for the reader*".[66] Consequently, he admits that persuading others of this perceived inventiveness will be short lived and require hard work without a full engagement with the "culture at large and with its history". Once again, aesthetic autonomy in reading is flummoxed, thus requiring Kindness as a "grammar of reading" to replace it.

The method Attridge employs to evade or disambiguate his thinking from ethical and contextual discussions is to formulate an artwork (or for his/our purposes a text, or poem) as an event rather than an object. The vital, temporal quality that is essential in Pound's ideology of the poem as an "emotional complex in an instant of time" is evoked once again but with the crucial distinction that Pound suggests that an image or poem is an object crafted by the poet – it presents the instant but it does not exist as an event. Attridge, on the other hand, makes clear that "singularity" can only be experienced as an event rather than as an object. One term I develop to negotiate or cope with this fascinating ethical disparity in reading a poem is, as discussed, "behaviour", a term meant to address the temporal and the spatial disparities between

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[65] Attridge, 45.
[66] Attridge, 45.

event and object and the incongruence between the autonomous (aesthetic) and ethical with a view toward the personal that Bennett and Sedgwick explore. Such a notion of a poem's "behaviour" is similar to Bennett's vibrant materiality but more specifically to her use of Bruno Latour's idea of "actant". As "a source of action; an actant can be human or not [see the poem itself] or, most likely, a combination of both. Latour defines it as 'something that acts or to which activity is granted by others…'".[67] "Behaviour" is my way of theorizing the "actant" in the reading of the poem; it is a term designed to signify both form and content and characterize the human/non-human relationship that reading engages in. It also represents the point at which Kindness intervenes in readings, thus allowing us to discuss the mobilizing effect the moment of Kindness has.

It is central to Attridge's position that the critical practice of separating form and content has become—in the years following New Criticism—damagingly obligatory. This separation, as Attridge points out, is central to the frequently rendered poetic proposition that there is a perfectible synchronicity of form and content itself. He observes that form is often avoided as "something of an embarrassment … on the way to a consideration of semantic, and thus historical, political, and ideological concerns".[68] Accordingly, the formal, as it is critically understood today, in fact represents the way, or method, with which "singularity" is achieved, that is, the arrangement of the same that brings "alterity" or "otherness" into view within the same *is* form itself. Part of Attridge's conviction behind the importance of reading a text as a performance or event is that if we can cease to read the objects of literature as static and instead view them, and by extension the reading of them, as a process then we might reconfigure our reading and thus invite a method that accommodates the understanding that form and content are not separate. Indeed, if we as readers bear Attridge's recommendations in mind we might understand form as actually motivating the literary work, "the formal sequence therefore functions as a *staging* of meaning and feeling".[69] This assertion complicates a thesis focused on poems that resolutely conceive of themselves as objects. Consequently, the term "staging" becomes extremely important to any idea of what "behaviour" might be because it suggests that the poem is a performative space that might be inhabited or

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[67] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 9.
[68] Attridge, 108.
[69] Attridge, 109.

"behaved" in, while also suggesting that the poem is the setting for the "actant". Attridge's solution, his use of the idea of a text as "event", is persuasive and yet I do not mean to simply apply it here to a series of works that have conditioned themselves specifically within the ideology of autonomy, rendering themselves objects. My aim, in the readings of Stein, Pound, Williams, Zukofsky, Reznikoff and Oppen that follow, is to model my work on Attridge's renegotiation of the Aesthetic tradition in light of the ethical compromise; to use his imperative to examine totalizing methodologies and construct a "grammar of reading"— Kindness—that can conceive of the poetic object as an event. To this end, I use the term "behaviour" with the intention of reexamining the humanizing qualities available in both ethics and aesthetics and thereby constructing a "grammar of reading" characterized as Kindness.

Another component of Attridge's work that is central to my own thesis is his conception of the poem as an "encounter with alterity" or in simpler, less phenomenologically charged terms, as "encounter". It is in this sense, then, that what I am calling a poem's "behaviour": is crucial. Purely formal readings predicated upon the separation of form and content essentially produce readings in which poems endlessly refer to one another. The contemporary imperative to investigate the historicity, the referentiality, or the ethics of a work, seems to me to inhibit the reader from getting at why the experience of reading a poem is "singular". By this I mean that the imperative of historicism, when it is the focus of literary criticism, seems to treat the poem as a cultural object (artifact) and, therefore, to use the poem to unlock the cultural, political, and ethical content of a certain historical moment. The aesthetic experience of reading a poem in terms of its "vibrant materialism" and its "singularity" is a means of responding to the poem's Kindness, an understanding of which ensures a reparative "grammar of reading" informs my readings of the poets in this thesis that is both ethical, in that it engages with the social, historical and political contexts, and aesthetic, by responding to the "singular" aesthetic event of the poem. Significantly, Attridge often refers to the "responsibility" of the reader and recommends close attention to and awareness of every relevant avenue of context. In doing so, he makes a demand that firmly aligns him with Sontag, that the commentator draw out the "singular" from a given text and that "the commentary itself, must strive to be a singular and inventive event, and thereby invite readings that

respond inventively to its own singularity and inventiveness".[70] This assertion might initially seem to revert back to the idea of aesthetic autonomy, but in this context, it is logical to re-inscribe a somewhat formalist reading into the modernism(s) that I examine here but always with an impetus toward disrupting a particular discourse with its own tools.

In order to avoid being merely combative, my approach is committedly alternative and meant to adhere to Sedgwick's invaluable proposal of being critically "Beside" a text and its readings. When introducing her engagement with the preposition, and the ideological, critical position that it affords, she discusses the multitudinous aspect of "Beside" as a critical position that is "undualistic":

> *Beside* is an interesting preposition also because there's nothing very dualistic about it; a number of elements may lie alongside one another, though not an infinity of them. *Beside* permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking: noncontradiction or the law of the excluded middle, cause versus effect, subject versus object. Its interest does not, however, depend on a fantasy of metonymically egalitarian or even pacific relations, as any child knows who's shared a bed with siblings. *Beside* comprises a wide range of desiring, identifying, representing, repelling, paralleling, differentiating, rivaling, leaning, twisting, mimicking, withdrawing, attracting, aggressing, warping, and other relations.[71]

Kindness seeks to accommodate the list that Sedgwick illuminates through *Beside*. The term characterizes the ideological position of Kindness and, therefore, the position from which I view and examine "behaviour" – the "actant" of the poem. It is pertinent to note that Sedgwick wants *Touching Feeling* to be "a project to explore promising tools and techniques for nondualistic thought and pedagogy".[72] The tools Sedgwick proposes are designed to expand critical space and provide an alternative critical model. The pedagogical implications of her thinking here correlate with my own understanding of "naïveté", since *Beside* posits a position that avoids the hierarchies of the heteronormative canon while still positing itself as valuable, a major ambition of the "grammar of reading" I am proposing.

Significantly, Attridge addresses the academy as, to a certain extent at least, inherently destructive to the study of literature. Similarly, Kindness is designed to address the study of the relationship a poem and a reader might have with critical

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[70] Attridge, 118.
[71] Sedgwick, 8.
[72] Sedgwick, 1.

literature. This means that the thesis has a complicated relationship with Attridge's imperatives. On the one hand, I embrace the unencumbered value and vitality that the study of "singularity" appears to grant a project, yet on the other it seems logical that there is a problem in putting "singularity" and Kindness together. I might argue that the "kin" in Kindness, in terms of Attridge's ideas, is in fact a term created to further explore the theoretical moment when "alterity" or "otherness" is encountered or, rather, when the encounter with "alterity" or "otherness" is brought about in the poem. Trying to theorize and explicate the phenomenon of this sort of encounter, he uses the problematic word "miracle".[73] However, the pursuit of Kindness might imbibe this imperative and work towards producing an ethical interpretation that theorizes not the encounter itself, or more specifically, the way it is brought about, but rather the implications of the moment of encounter within each poem—the movement and formal meanings that change reading from encounter to recognition. This is why "behaviour" is such an important component of my analysis as it is that which seeks out kinship. For a Kindness as a "grammar of reading" to function it does not only need to acknowledge a legacy of ethics but must also renegotiate within the set perimeters of over twenty-five years of selected American modernist poems *and* the ethical implications of aesthetics, and vice versa.

Woods's *The Poetics of the Limit* provides a crucial understanding for my argument here in that it renegotiates contemporary readings of Zukofsky as a poet working within Pound's Imagist legacy. This is more significant than simply taking issue with Kenner's relatively dismissive description of the Objectivist movement as "born mature", which is often the starting point for any contemporary scholarship on the Objectivists, although Woods does explicitly respond to Kenner's suggestion that these poets "are the best testimony to the strength of that tradition: to the fact that it had a substance separable from the revolutionary high spirits of its launching".[74] Woods's contention is that Kenner is correct, but only in the sense that Objectivism does have a "substance separable" from the Imagist tradition. However the substance he discusses is an altogether different "revolutionary high spirit". This is why Woods is crucial to my own examination of the departure from the totalitarianism of high modernism embodied in Pound's Imagism that Zukofsky's early Objectivism

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[73] Attridge, 99.
[74] Hugh Kenner, *A Homemade World: The American Modernist Writers*, (London: Marion Boyars, 1977), 169;169.

represents. The poetic moments that at once connect Objectivism and Imagism and signal a point of departure will be analyzed in an aesthetic and ethical sense as examples of Kindness in poetry. A preliminary illustration of such a moment of interrelation can be found in Reznikoff's poem number 69 from *Jerusalem the Golden*: "Among the heaps of brick and plaster lies/ a girder, still itself among the rubbish".[75] The objectness or thing-ness of the poem in terms of "vibrant matter" is clear, so too is the parataxis that Jennison observes in the Imagist commitment to precision and of course crucially the aesthetic/ethic moment of "singularity".

Woods's consistent attention to the ethics of Zukofsky's later aesthetics in "A" is also helpful here. While his methodological model might differ from mine, my thesis owes a lot to his theories regarding the fatality of Pound's fascistic totalitarianism and Zukofsky's sense of the "infinite" as Adorno constructs it, even though my analysis concentrates on poems written prior to the period Woods focuses on. Part of the foundational structure of reading Kindness is an idea of encounter with the poem as object/event, which can also be more critically understood in terms of a comparison, hence the relevance of Woods's argument about Zukofsky's departure from Imagism and his examination of the important resonances between Objectivism and Imagism. This is why, as I have previously discussed, I initially offer a critical reading of Stein's work as a means to establish the basic tenets of what Kindness is not. An important aspect of any discussion of how Kindness might be read is contingent upon an understanding of the "humanist" approach, that is, the personal over the autonomous. Because of the attendant ethical issues, "behaviour" again assumes vital significance.

Woods's exploration of the implications of "sincerity" for Zukofsky is crucial to his deconstruction of the – until recently – commonly held understanding of the ideological motivators behind the Objectivist moment as outlined by Kenner. Zukofsky, according to Woods, renegotiates the "anti-humanist" position that has been read as synonymous with the "objectivist" quality of earlier high modernism. By further exploring the implications of the "sincerity and objectification" that the Objectivists generally agree to be their motivating principle, Woods opens up the discussion on the fascinating and inherent problem with collapsing the aesthetic and ethical binary. However, Woods reads "objectification" as pertaining to the

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[75] Reznikoff, *The Poems* 107.

epistemological rather than the aesthetic, this is an important distinction to make in the context my thesis which is a discourse that largely begins with the Poundian concept of "objectification" that still posits the aesthetic as the locus of the poem, but also understands the aesthetic to be comprised by a universal epistemology—as that which everyone "KNOWS". Or put another way, part of the problem with reading Imagism and Objectivism is the inherently compromised notion of the simplicity of the link and the fluidity of understanding between the aesthetic and the epistemological.

A further observation Woods makes regarding the conflation of sincerity and objectification, a pairing he sees as constructing a binary, is that it somehow appears "naïve" and that this "naïveté rests in the odd juxtaposition of ethical terms ('sincerity' and 'love') with epistemological terms ('objectification' and 'reason')".[76] As an idea originating in formalist ideas about reading, Kindness might seem to have an inherent naïveté to it. However, it has an important role to play in discussions of autonomy in both artistic production (writing) and reading (knowledge). Naïveté is, according to Attridge and Woods for example, generally understood as a negative position, yet it might be developed to represent a reading that is anti-instrumental and still ethically aware, as Bennett proposes. While this thesis does not aim to be naïve, it does aim to embrace the naïveté of Zukofsky's collapsed binary of sincerity and objectification. Indeed, the ostensibly naïve conflation of sincerity with objectification is at the heart of the agenda here, since the poetic encounter, as it is encountered in reading can accommodate this conflation, consequently making naïveté crucial to the "grammar of reading" that Kindness presents.

Bennett uses the etymology of the word "absolute … that which is *loosened off* and on the loose" when she models the Catholic idea of absolution.[77] However, the essence of her argument is that what is crucial to her methodology in the pursuit of the expression of the "thing power" of "vibrant matter" is an absolution of, or from, epistemological modes of comprehension. This resonates with Woods's own explorations of the "infinite" in Zukofsky's "A" and this sense of critical absolution illuminates what might be a naïveté in Kindness itself in its negotiation between autonomy and epistemological demands. Reading "behaviour" as Kindness in a poem

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[76] Tim Woods, *The Poetics of the Limit: Ethics and Politics in Modern and Contemporary American Poetry* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 5.
[77] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 3, (Author's emphasis).

might well be contingent on a certain readerly absolution of naïveté in the moment of reading itself, which is clearly an ethical position that might be considered counter-intuitive to the academy. It should be noted, however, that this might also present a legitimate way to critically re-address these early moments in American modernism, some of which have been so canonized and some of which have not. Furthermore, through a "grammar of reading" Kindness will draw on a different set of criteria to permit the reader access to a compromised and complicated lineage that does not necessarily defer to hierarchies of knowledge that excludes poets due to their own marginalized status, a task crucial to Woods's project. Therefore, a consideration of the poetic aesthetic and ethical implications of the Jewish immigrant experiences of Zukofsky and Reznikoff, and to a lesser extent Oppen, that have been traditionally mediated through a Poundian Imagist legacy is completely appropriate to any exploration of Kindness. Self-consciousness and the anxieties of naïveté are crucial to this discussion, however problematically they might reside within the context of production. Consequently, it is also necessary to locate these moments of Kindness, or the limits of Kindness, in Pound as a counter to the anxieties of naïveté yet still as arbiters of concrete formal modes of expression.

It is necessary to briefly return to the binary Woods discusses when developing Charles Altieri's notion of the modernist binary: symbolism and the Imagist-Objectivist tradition as limiting ideologies that too readily conflate Imagism and Objectivism. Woods argues that Zukofsky's "sincerity" allows him to fall on either side of Altieri's binary, even establishing the grounds for what Woods considers to be a key ethical moment, that is, Zukofsky's departure from a Poundian poetics. Woods's argument generally refers to the work Zukofsky produced after the period my analysis focuses on, although he does figure "Poem Beginning 'The'" as important in Zukofsky's nascent departure from Poundian poetics when he argues that "there are no essences in this perspective".[78] Nevertheless, Wood's argument about sincerity is important to identifying Kindness in these earlier poems. My analysis might imply a chronology conforming to Altieri's construct of the Poundian paradigm as a prefiguration of Objectivism but it is not my intention to even implicitly affirm what was, until recently, the accepted standard of qualitative understanding of American modernism. Kindness need not have anything to do with Pound since I

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[78] Woods, 32.

present it as a "grammar of reading" developed through an examination of these short modernist texts composed at the beginning of each poet's career. It is important to remember that Kindness does not function as another word for Poundian brevity and the notion of the instant of communication that his work on the ideogram proposes. Nor does it only express an idea of the "behavioural" nature of the infinite in Zukofsky's work. Instead, Kindness begins with a formal apprehension of encounter. It is an ethical term yet it must remain "singular" or, better still, personal. Crucially, it remains *Beside* the encounter, the "behaviour". Kindness relies on a form of reading that thrives in these moments for different reasons and I use the ultimately left-wing, immigrant ethics explored in Objectivism to characterize a type of "behaviour" of the text, a textual ethics or way of "behaving" that provides a diverse and flexible "grammar of reading".

Woods describes the ethical relationship inherent in Imagism as positing "a master-servant relationship between writer and reader, where meaning is thought to be commanded not shared".[79] This perspective, an extension of Hegel's slave analogy, provides a defining problem for an argument about Kindness, chiefly, how can an ethics of absolutism and totality produce a movement that I use as nascent to the production of a "grammar of reading" that is so ethically precarious as to be termed Kindness? [80] McCaffery outlines Lyotard's concerns about this perspective as one that creates a self-affirming binary that aims to separate theory from object (poem), but ultimately binds the two together[81]. This problem foregrounds a foundational aspect of Kindness as a method of reading that departs from the totalities of a text, but lingers equally on the ambivalence of the naïve reader. Zukofsky, Woods argues, develops sincerity in response to Pound's unequivocal totality in Imagism and, I would argue further, that the actions and syntactical "behaviour" of a poem, when read in defiance of Pound's "master-servant" ideal, allows for the advent of Kindness in reading. The political implications present in Zukofsky's originally close, and then somewhat distant, relationship with Pound, are perhaps the crucial point to take away from Woods--a fact often over-looked as is the political impetus

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[79] Woods, 26.
[80] McCaffery describes Hegel's analysis thus: "The essence of the slave is to exist for another, while the self-consciousness of the master depends upon the slave's own dependence on him." McCaffery, 4.
[81] McCaffery, 4.

behind the aesthetic response to the strengthening American artistic allegiance to the Left amongst the poets I discuss.[82]

Woods points to Zukofsky's "incessant rethinking" in "Poem Beginning 'The'" as being a specifically political gesture in response to the hierarchical, anti-Semitic, values of T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land". "The Waste Land" can then be read as an attempt to reclaim an aesthetics which *also* must bear the burden of "tradition" as Eliot would have it; the poem, therefore, is politically unsound, elitist, and unacceptable. The aesthetic/ethic negotiation at the heart of Woods's argument is explored using Levinas's ethical phenomenology and, like Attridge, Jennison, and Bennett, Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*. Adorno is employed in support of Woods's readings through his critical discourse on the inadequacies of aesthetic formalism when he (Woods) quotes "Reconciliation Under Duress". Referring to Adorno's critique of Georg Lukacs, Woods observes how he fails to recognize "the objective function of formal elements in determining the aesthetic content of modern art [since] he willfully misinterprets them as arbitrary ingredients added by an over-inflated subjectivism"[83]. It is important to keep in mind here Attridge's efforts to dismantle the historic and ideologically constructed binary of "form" and "meaning".[84] Woods discusses Zukofsky's multifarious negotiations with structure and ultimately the creation of form using a newly understood definition seen in the early sections of "A", observing how:

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[82] Although this is increasingly less true, work is beginning to emerge regarding this connection, for example, John Lowney's *History, Memory, and the Literary Left: Modern American Poetry, 1935-1968* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006).

[83] Woods, 42.

[84] The problem Woods discusses here is one echoed in Peter Quartermain's critique of Pound's willful a historicity :

> In the opening of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", Pound affords virtually a classic insistence of the postcolonial writer's dilemma. Invoking the peremptory English structure in order to undermine its monolithic authority, the poem ends up reinforcing what it seeks to dismiss, for the reader needs the cultural apparatus the poem questions in order to understand that the apparatus is being challenged. In inviting the reader to place the stuffy and self-satisfied voice of educated literary authority against the personal voice of the (imaginary?) poet and find it wanting, the poem ends up acculturating readers to the hegemonic standard. In demanding that readers recognise a culture they may not know, the poem is likely to be misunderstood by those whose experience of clubby cultivated London literary voices is too limited for nuances of tone to be significant, or to do other than baffle them. [...] To disregard such tensions, or to dismiss them as inconsistencies and thus as "errors" is to dehistoricise these writers.
> Quartermain, *Disjunctive Poetics*, 13.

What sets out as a search for some way of negotiating a conflict between a simplistic division between political commitment and aesthetic autonomy and integrity transforms into an exploration of the "ideology of forms." The desire for an aesthetics that harmonizes disparate entities and perspectives is constantly adjusting, reviewing, and amending its stance to accept this dissonance and discordance as an intrinsic part of the poem's ethical structure.[85]

This constant shifting and harmonizing of aesthetics roughly describes the quality of the project this thesis presents: a "grammar of reading" that does not so much seek to account for these shifting discordances but to accommodate them within its poetics. That is to not to say that it will allow for or encourage reading that melts texts together, in fact Kindness is structured in its very core upon difference and distinction, encounter, recognition, and resonance. On every level, this proposed "grammar of reading" is so occupied with difference and the forces that interact as a result of difference that Kindness ends up being the formal product *and* method of responding to difference as facilitating encounter and recognition, the "behaviour" of the text.

As discussed earlier, "behaviour" allows for an idea of autonomy to reside in reading with an ethical acknowledgement, meaning the term subjectivity is also clearly at stake. Woods's arguments regarding the ideology of the subject highlight some crucial questions that arise when reading Pound which are, in turn, vital for the entire idea of Kindness. Woods's distinction between Imagism and Objectivism are defining conditions for this thesis. The differences he identifies between Imagism and Objectivism as being informed by the difference between totality and infinity are most evident during the moments of encounter with the "other", those instances of recognition.[86]  These moments are also encounters between the ethical and the aesthetic, with the poem "behaving" in a way that accommodates them both, for example, Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The'", "Speaking about epics, mother",[87] Oppen's "She lies, hip high",[88] and Reznikoff's "AFTER RAIN", "The motor-cars on

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[85] Woods, 67-68.
[86] It is worth noting here that in some respects Woods' argument is founded on Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, in which he argues that the face-to-face encounter with another person is the bedrock of ethics. This notion of the encounter can be seen to inform my notion of "recognition."
[87] Louis Zukofsky, *ANEW: Complete Short Poetry, With a Foreword by Robert Creeley* (New York: New Directions, 2011),15.
[88] George Oppen, *The Collected Poems of George Oppen* (New York: New Directions, 1975), 9.

the shining street move in semicircles of spray, semicircles of spray".[89] "Behaviour" is crucial during these moments, while important ethical commitments are at stake in the tension between Pound's fascism and Zukofsky's left-wing liberalism. This thesis is concerned with the encounter between self and "other", or subject and object, and how the text "behaves" to accommodate the reader's experience. Therefore, while totalizing philosophies that motivate Pound's Imagism are in stark contrast to Zukofsky's, there are moments at which their poetics, or perhaps their "poethics", coincide which have significant ethical implications for the reader. Woods argues that this moment of meeting in Zukofsky provides what critics consider to be an instance of naïveté; the poet's polarized motivations that are inherent in the Imagism-Objectivism binary provide a crucial model for how a "grammar of reading" might attempt to reconcile these apparent opposites through moments of encounter. Ultimately, my intention is to characterize one element of the readerly experience, or the linguistic "behavioural" encounter, while endorsing, even enjoying, the tensions of naïveté inherent in this "grammar of reading" itself. Spinoza, defines falsity as a lack of knowledge, which is an attempt to contain the infinite. Falsity, in Spinoza's sense, is essential to the infinite (as Adorno would use the term) and in relation to the particular too. In its crucial element of not knowing, it defines the thesis' attitude toward the idea of encounter. Furthermore, acceptance rather than absorption of difference as a motivating power in the reading of the poem is thus a key premise of the thesis, as I posit a methodology that embraces, in some cases even enacting, naïveté and "falseness" as an in-built caveat with which to track Kindness as an aesthetic and ethical phenomenon within the reading of poetry. As a "grammar", the structuring method of ordering language, it considers content and form to be one, while also acknowledging the extraordinary moments of linguistic encounter that are possible in always compromised, yet still somehow uncompromising, "poethical" historical moment.

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[89] Reznikoff, *The Poems*, 100.

# Charles Reznikoff and the Roots of Kindness

My understanding of Kindness initially developed in response to Reznikoff, in particular in the way he presents a benevolent gaze and attempts to achieve a sense of empathy in his minimalistic, fragmentary verse in combination with the preoccupation with sincerity. The notion of exile, and in turn assimilation and an inherently humanitarian approach to poetic presentation, is also evident throughout his oeuvre but most apparently in *Testimony* and *Holocaust*, which present tangible examples of the type of thinking anyone might do in order to process and understand the world about them. The epigram of *Testimony*, in its various printings and volumes, is taken from Ephesians IV, 31., "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice".[90] The epigraph reveals the measures that Reznikoff means to take, in fact even offering instruction to the reader whilst describing the poetic project, encouraging the reader to calmly look at the scenes laid out before him/her. Of course these poems are composed from court transcripts and, therefore, convey a tension between sworn truth and the suspicion of contempt. However, it is not the legal quality of the poems that makes them seem Kind but the patience they evince as Reznikoff combines the precision of the court document with the gaze of the poet. The resultant poems are clear and their "behaviour" is minimal yet thoroughly evident. Consider "The Job" for example:

> Amelia was just fourteen and out of the orphan asylum; at her first job— in the bindery, and yes sir, yes ma'am, oh so anxious to please.
> She stood at the table, her blonde hair hanging about her shoulders, "knocking up" for Mary and Sadie, the stitchers
> ("knocking up" is counting books and stacking them in piles to be taken away).[91]

Reznikoff uses clear and conversational language here to engender sympathy for the girl Amelia who "was *just* fourteen" and an orphan. He, the poet, was evidently not there; he did not know the girl but he is using his trace poetics to relate what happened to her. In this sense, the "behaviour" of the poem is more present than

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[90] Charles Reznikoff, *Testimony, with an Introduction by Kenneth Burke* (New York: The Objectivist Press, 1934), Title page.
[91] Charles Reznikoff, *Going To and Fro and Walking Up and Down* (New York: Futuro Press, 1941), 51.

Reznikoff. Furthermore, since the poem is written from witness statements it does in fact evince a voice that was present even though the poem as an object/event is specifically not witness to the action of its subject, thus revealing itself to be a work of production that is largely about reading, recovering others' perceptions through their words.

Transcribing and presenting a narrative that ends with brutal quietness, Amelia is required to crawl underneath the table of twenty stitching machines:

> She felt her hair caught gently;
> put her hand up felt the shaft going round and round
> and her hair caught on it, wound and winding around it,
> until the scalp was jerked from her head,
> and blood was coming down all over her face and waist.[92]

The quietness of the poem mirrors the unrecoverable horror of Amelia's death. There are many other poems from *Testimony* that do not possess the quite lyrical quality of "The Job", "going round and round/and her hair caught on it, wound and wringing around it".[93] However, the delivery of this poem, ostensibly from an "objective" source, is full of different types of "behaviour". The lyricism of the winding cogs make for rather beautiful internal rhymes and revolutions, increasing the momentum of the phrasing and thereby replicating the machinery itself, while the impossibility of stopping them is expressed in the queasy quickness and quietness of "she felt her hair caught gently". These elements ring through the poem and yet the poem is detached since its language seems more concerned than the poem itself or the act of witnessing informing the poem; it is as though the poem operates at multiple volumes or pitches with each one distinct. This sense of observing and feeling, forces patience of mind when the reader experiences the poem. As an object, the poem is the object of horror, its machinations and mechanisms producing the posture of the text, yet it is ultimately about itself as a poem, self-conscious and self-reflexive.

Extending from this example by Reznikoff, this thesis will argue that the detached position of the observer or reader derived from an Objectivist poetics provides the platform upon which these works are produced. His poetry is constantly informed by a compulsion to apprehend before one comprehends, thus encouraging a

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[92] Reznikoff, *Going To and Fro*, 51-2.
[93] Reznikoff, *Going To and Fro*, 52.

certain patience of mind. This detachment or patience of mind may seem to aesthetically exploit the modernist idea of presenting the "thing itself" but it actually involves renegotiating these moments on a very human scale. For instance, when Pound discusses the human knowledge of red in the ideogram, we can find a strange and horrified analogous moment to this when Reznikoff repeats the courtroom testimonies that have so troubled and occupied him. They occupy the poet with that same elusive sense of impervious solidity that Pound defers onto red. Crucially, however, Pound's certainty of knowledge is in stark contrast to Reznikoff's certainty of ignorance, yet both are motivated by the certainty of aesthetics that compels them to *present* the image in the modernist tradition. Despite this, due to Reznikoff's complicated apprehension of sincerity, the poems must themselves tease out that which Pound considers the reader's job, that is, comprehension. "An image [may be] that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" but Reznikoff approaches that instant with a poetic patience of mind that defers to the reader and in doing so provides an initial example of Kindness.[94]

In addition, the contrast between Pound and Reznikoff means that questions of language itself are pulled into relief, such as: does legal testimony present something akin to the physical knowledge of red? Are either of these "truths" true? Do they represent anything other than the human pursuit of, or indeed the avoidance of, knowledge, "truth" or justice? As always, subjectivity and language, are inseparable from these issues. However, this project aims to discuss specific poems in great detail and propose the terms of a new "grammar of reading" based on Kindness itself. Kindness is developed through the fixation on and exploration of a couple of key terms and ideas, in order to develop a "grammar of reading" that will aim at allowing a reader to, at the very most, determine whether a particular poem or a specific line can be read as Kind, and ultimately whether poem X or line Y are Kind or, at the very least, demonstrate a way of reading that engages with Kindness. Naturally enough, the major challenge here is precisely the major resource, the fluidity of modernist verse and the extremely fluid and subjective nature of Kindness as a human instinct or an action in itself. In order to explore and investigate this confluence, I employ certain key terms as outlined above, primarily, "behaviour", Sedgwick's "reparative reading",

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[94] Ezra Pound, *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound,* 4.

Bennett's "vibrant materiality" and Attridge's "singularity" will support the subsequent textual analyses.

The scope of the thesis spans the twenty years between the publication of Stein's *Tender Buttons* and Oppen's *Discrete Series*, while spanning the Atlantic Ocean by beginning with expatriate American poets in Europe and ending with first and second generation European immigrant poets in American. All these poets are of course American poets, but their early work can be considered in terms of a pervasive sense of exile, which can be extended to examine how they are then read through the lens of the exiled neophyte or the naïve reader. The relationship between nationality and location will be discussed but exile, more importantly, will function as a way of understanding certainty, vulnerability, cultural exile, assimilation and, ultimately, the feeling of not-knowing.

Ezra Pound's didactic compulsions and his forceful confidence in certainty allow him to present the image with the conviction of omniscience. His faith, poetically, is always vested in the image, such that he need not bother with any other questions of certainty; the image proves itself. This self-appointed omniscience is evident in his most famous poem, "In a Station of the Metro":

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough.[95]

Zukofsky, finds Dante's inferno in the subterranean setting and the ghostly souls that float by. His reading suggests a celestial presence, the almost tangible presence, of the mythic, which has been seen and portrayed, and now falls into the service of allegory. The detached voice that sings these few syllables answers to none; the poem seems to float like the faces and stick like the petals. What then of the "wet, black bough"? There is something plainly textual about that object, as though it gleams like a consciousness that images stick to rather than one that these images are absorbed by. The superficiality of this "bough" and the surfaces of the poem force the reader to a point at which they understand the "bough" to be the poem; the canvas that has been lit upon by the image. The "bough" (arboreal; organic, growing and yet stationary) provides the surface, or platform, of the reader's understanding. That is, the bough almost seems to provide the page that the poem appears upon (i.e. it is writ upon the

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[95] Pound, *Personæ*, 111.

bough). In this sense it becomes the body or the space of the poem, which then of course becomes an image. The image of the bough and the body of the poem provide the platform or space for the reader's understanding, which in turn becomes the body and the space of the poem. This cyclical structure and synthesized process is a seminal moment in modernism, yet a conflict between the distance of the voice and the acuteness of the image remains, which, I would argue, resonates with Pound's suggestion in "I gather the limbs of Osiris" that "I am more interested in life than in any part of it".[96]

Proximity becomes volatile in this reading of "In a Station…", indicating a pertinent issue to be addressed in the thesis as a whole. Closeness and perspective are important considerations when we consider the "behaviour" of a poem because the symbolic significance of the direction of the gaze in the poem is normally the first element that needs to be considered. Like McCaffery, I find elements of Michel De Certeau's critique of historiography useful as a way of considering the neophyte reading and the nuances that the poem as a plane provides. De Certeau's discussion of the hierarchical influence of the downward gaze is implicit in my own readings. While the position and direction of the gaze in "In a Station…" may not be explicitly downward, the poem does possess, indeed it is almost solely composed of, distance as the image is perfected by the poem. This is how I interpret the omniscience de Certeau discusses in terms of looking down from a great height in my readings of Pound.  In addition, the implication of equality that comes with a level gaze and the minimizing effects of staring upwards complete the general conditions that will be used to explore the problematised notion of Poundian modernist omniscience and the attendant conviction that the correct or good aesthetic can reconfigure the subjective text as "truth" or scientific fact.

Pound's work on Ernest Fenollosa's "An Essay on the Chinese Written Character" uses the Ideogram to discuss the epistemological and intuitive nature of language. He explains the significance of the ideogram as relying on a collective consciousness that produces a language to give the reader a far more tangible grasp on meaning than the grasp that the Roman alphabet could ever hope to achieve. This notion is expanded upon here using Attridge's notion of the ideoculture, with the

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[96] Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965,* ed. and intro. by William Cookson (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), 23.

important distinction that he formulates the ideoculture as specific to each individual whereas Pound considers that a valuable reader will have the same ideoculture as the poet, or at least work to attain a similar one. Pound is reliant on the full nature of the reader's experiential knowledge, demanding a high level of esoteric knowledge from his reader. But for the moment, the significant point is the assumption that "red is based on something everyone KNOWS", that despite understanding being, on a certain level, intuitive, the direction and distance of the gaze in the poem is foundational to the "behaviour" of that poem.[97] The downward study of a gaze appears to immediately position the poem as above that which it captures, thus establishing a particular posture or attitude, a sense of form that is in one sense a facet of the poem's structure and yet not exactly a formal structure in the strict poetic sense. Posture here refers to the way the poem seems to stand in the same way we might read the posture of a person. The direction of the gaze creates the relationship between the poem and its subject, suggesting that it is the poem itself looking or observing.

Proximity also reveals "behaviour" through Imagist connotations, but this is not to suggest a prescribed usage of proximity and perspective is being proposed. Rather, to begin discussing the implications of the distance and the direction of the observing lens is to not only characterize the "behaviour" of the poem but to also approach the relationship it has with certain bodies of knowledge, or ideocultures. The gaze of the poem is anthropomorphized into a characteristic of the poem that is available to the reader. However, the question of power is always at stake in this method of reading, in addition to a sense of vulnerability, both of which are crucial as a way of understanding the mechanics of how a poem "behaves" and of defining Kindness in relief against these notions. As De Certeau explains, "the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more".[98] This "lust to be a viewpoint" and the suggestion of knowledge being a fiction are fascinating ways of considering the ethics of Pound's Imagism.

William Carlos Williams is normally widely regarded as providing a proletarian, American, and, in *Spring and All*, an avant-garde antidote to Pound's Eurocentric esotericism. His poetic voice observes and records as he attempts to

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[97] Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 1960), 22.
[98] Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 1984), 92.

make his reader *know* the image and the subject of the poem typified by "The Lonely Street":

> School is over. It is too hot
> to walk at ease. At ease
> in light frocks they walk the streets
> to while the time away.
> They have grown tall. They hold
> pink flames in their right hands.
> In white from head to foot,
> with sidelong, idle look—
> in yellow, floating stuff,
> black sash and stockings—
> touching their avid mouths
> with pink sugar on a stick—
> like a carnation each holds in her hand—
> they mount the lonely street.[99]

Here Williams presents some school girls walking and eating candy-floss; they are engaged in following "the thicks and thins of an urban 'text'".[100] The repetition in the second line gives the poem the stifling quality as it describes "to walk at ease. At ease". Repetition over a listless full stop enacts the heat-mired subject of the poem, with "at ease" recalling the military command to relax, which is not often repeated. Williams uses this repetition to pour rhythmic molasses over his lines, raising the question of where is Williams, or at least, his voice. Where does the perspective or gaze come from?

The fifth line begins "They have grown tall" and situates the girls in their bodies, in their burgeoning maturity while they stroll about eating candy floss. The observation is incisively familiar, it could come from a family member, full of attention and perhaps a rather sinister affection; it colours the adolescent female body with the memory of childhood. Physical development and over-attention creep into this observation since it could not be made at a distance. However, the affectionate liberty the fifth line takes could be a glance down, up or around; it positions the poem in an elevated viewpoint of knowledge. This is not the knowledge that turns human objects into metaphors like the "Petals, on a wet, black bough" seen in Pound. The subject for the metaphor in this poem is the inanimate totem that each girl carries, the

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[99] William Carlos Williams, *The Williams Carlos Williams Reader,* ed. and intro by M. L. Rosenthal (New York: New Directions Books, 1966), 14.
[100] De Certeau, 93.

"pink flame" of the candy floss, a cheap and hopeful carnation. The viewpoint is elevated by the supposition that the voice knows of and feels for the human experience, a profound understanding of life in a gesture of ingratiation towards the lived experience of the human subject. Perhaps it is exactly this presumption in the poem that represents a poetic distance.

De Certeau suggests that "escaping the imaginary totalizations produced by the eye, the everyday, has a certain strangeness that does not surface, or whose surface is only its upper limit, outlining itself against the visible".[101] Perhaps the fifth line of "The Lonely Street" is a point at which everyday strangeness does surface in the girls' growth and development, in Williams's poeticising of the unfinished quality of the adolescent body. The problem for this reading in terms of De Certeau is that it is a product of an "imaginary totalization produced by the eye." Observing an object, presenting it and then attempting to do so as human and poetic forces open the impossibility of knowing and the marvelousness of a whole image that is necessarily riven with seams and tears of necessary distance. These veins of distance that marble the otherwise more proletarian modernist poem are apparent where proximity to omniscience is not a given. In such instances, hegemonic power cannot be blindly subscribed to, revealing a certain vulnerability as privilege and a notion voice that coalesce to form a posture that does not determine but instead informs the "behaviour" of the poem. When reading poets like Reznikoff and Zukofsky, that is, first or second generation immigrant poets whose cultural credentials are potentially as exposed and exposing in their "American-ness" as their parents' accents, certainty is at stake. The resultant self-consciousness is, therefore, vital to my discussion of them. Like the declarations of Pound, when certainty is a question of clarity of presentation and assured knowledge, certainty for Reznikoff is a question of clarity and proximity to the object itself. Consider in Williams a line like "They have grown tall", which is not concerned with narrative (i.e. the time it took to grow) but rather with expressing proximity, a somatic understanding of adolescent growth. This distinction between narrative and proximity is a means of presenting and discussing a poetics of "behaviour", the method of reparative reading, and the idea of "vibrant singularity" that are all central to the "grammar of reading" I propose to call Kindness.

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[101] De Certeau, 93.

## Chapter Precis:

The chapters in this thesis all have the same aim: to provide reparative readings of modernist poetics in order to discern their "behaviour" and develop a "grammar of reading" that is Kindness. The first chapter focuses on *Tender Buttons* by Gertrude Stein as "what Kindness is not", and discusses the notions of vulnerability and the readerly experience. The second chapter provides a brief sketch of the cultural and readerly imperatives that invite readings of "behaviour" in Kindness. It also includes preliminary readings of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" and *Spring and All* to develop the method of reading the poem's "behaviour" and understand the position of vulnerability. Chapter Three continues the analysis of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" and *Spring and All* but offers a more in depth comparative study of the functions of "behaviour", the notions of certainty and the methods by which we as readers might read these. One of the primary purposes of this chapter is to foreground what will appear in the later chapters on Zukofsky, Reznikoff and Oppen, by considering the notions of exile in Poundian high modernisms and in Williams's avant-garde poetics. The fourth chapter focuses almost exclusively on a developed reading of "Poem Beginning 'The'" as a demonstration of reading Kindness in exile. It also serves to further build a picture of the cultural negotiations Zukofsky effects in this poem, what Bob Perelman describes as "effect[ing] a total break with his juvenilia".[102] It also provides further groundwork for the Chapter Five, which analyses Oppen's *Discrete Series* and Reznikoff's *Jerusalem the Golden* to demonstrate how Kindness as a "grammar of reading" most comfortably coalesces in a poetic. This chapter will further indicate how the notions of naïveté and vulnerability develop into an account of "*not knowing*" in reading and poetics that is in direct contrast to the precisions Objectivism evinces as its *modus operandi*. Finally, the conclusion suggests a further perspective on Kindness and "*not knowing*", with readings providing some alternative models for close, reparative readings of Kindness, exile, naiveté and vulnerability. Using Oppen's and Reznikoff's texts, which explicitly engage with these topics, I hope to further illustrate methods of reading Kindness that gesture beyond the thirty year framework of this particular survey and the first/second generation American modernism(s) I examine to elucidate it in the first place.

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[102] Perelman, 174.

# Chapter 1: An Introduction to Kindness through Gertrude Stein as what Kindness is not

This chapter aims to identify the specific meaning of Kindness as it functions in my thesis, proposing the question: can we find the origins of Kindness as a "grammar of reading" in modernist American poetry? A secondary, but perhaps even more crucial, question is: what does Kindness look like in modernist American poetry? I will focus in this chapter on *Tender Buttons* by Gertrude Stein. I do this as a means to explore what Kindness is not: ultimately suggesting in Stein's work the suggestive potential of Kindness can be found while also exploring the reasons for its failure to materialize. This distinction is vital to how I position my argument in the subsequent work on Pound, Williams, Zukofsky, Oppen, and Reznikoff. As such in this chapter I lay out developments on the notions of "behaviour", vulnerability and naivety as they continue to define Kindness as a "grammar of reading". The purpose is to discuss the meaning of Kindness as it appears in terms of technique and content, and to acknowledge the space, or alternatively the gap, between words and meaning, between language and understanding, in poetics.[103] Aesthetic agency, or an ethics of aesthetics, in poetry will also be explored to help clarify some questions regarding "ease" and "seriousness" in poetry with regard to how "difficulty" is often (mis)read as "seriousness". In this context, I mean to discuss the readerly experience in Stein's

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[103] DuPlessis is definitive on the relevance and the irrefutability of the "gap" in poetry in practical, ethical and literary terms: "Poetry also sequences: it is the creation of meaningful sequence by the negotiation of gap (line break, stanza break, page space). Although the other practices (e.g. fiction or drama) may have periodicities or gaps, these are more constitutive and systemic in poetry. Poetry can then be defined as the kind of writing that is articulated in sequenced, gapped lines and whose meanings are created by occurring in bound units, units operating in relation to chosen pause or silence. The line segment creates meanings. The acts of making lines and making their particular chains of rupture, seriality, and sequencing are fundamental to the nature of poetry as a genre. Fundamental to what can be said in poetry, as poetry". Continuing further, "In their use of fragmented phrases, Oppen's lines are not static, but the phrases, taken as objects, seem to stream toward each other in a desire for connectedness in the "between" created by the poem." DuPlessis, *Blue Studios*, 199; 204.

early work, with the intention of sketching out a working model with which to begin reading Kindness in, or indeed *into*, modernist American poetry.

The first and most essential task for this thesis is to make a space for the reparative position, to occupy the space between words. However, it is important to note that while I am examining Kindness in poetry, this should not be confused with a concern for sentimentality, romantic or even filial love, or an appreciation of the scenery. Nevertheless, these themes and many others provide the structural framework that supports the Kindness I am in search of, which is far less superficial than sweetness and gaiety in verse, in fact it most definitely abjures superficiality. Kindness as a "grammar of reading" aims at providing a binding moment of aesthetics and ethics, an instance of compromise and pleasure. Kindness can provide an alternative to a "paranoid" understanding because it employs synthesis rather than an observed, educated guess. In this sense Kindness refers to Attridge's "singularity" and equally the moment of "vibrant materialism" that Bennett discusses. That is, it is simultaneously general and specific, deeply personal yet still affecting a certain unity of understanding between the poet, the poem and the reader. It affects a reparative position so thoroughly because it must function on the understanding that, whilst we cannot *know* each-other's personal form of understanding, we can at least acknowledge this lack, or gap, and attempt to redress it by relying on individual personal knowledge as it is evoked by the type of poetry being analyzed here to gain access to a broader field of understanding.

Because it expresses a "positive affect," the term Kindness must be applied to knowledge and communication. It refers to knowledge completely preoccupied with human understanding and, therefore, sharing, that is, a form of knowledge *about* communication. The term Kindness is used to suggest a compulsion to communicate *and* understand that verges on the physical. Consequently, "meaning" will appear in inverted commas throughout the chapter because it is both too loose and too rigid a term for my argument at this point, implying a certain finality of understanding that somewhat negates the quality essential to Kindness. That is, the Kindness we might discern as possible in reparative readings, or in this context more specifically, in the "grammar of reading" possible in American modernist poetry.

I begin with Stein, who provides a basis for the theory of Kindness being dependent on language as an inverted agent that necessarily reconfigures itself *within*

a poem, thus enacting what I term the "behaviour" of a poem.[104] Stein provides an excellent preliminary model of the literary act of elbowing into the space between words and then occupying it to invite the reader to occupy it too. It is in this space that Kindness emerges and remains apparent.

## Rhythm, Ease and the Gap in *Tender Buttons*

In *Tender Buttons*, Stein writes a series of poems that resonate loudly with certain criteria and discussions that Bennett raises in *Vibrant Matter*, engaging not just with the idea of the "actant" but also providing verses that might be read as *"Affective Bodies"*.[105] The close readings of *Tender Buttons*, therefore, seek to explore Stein's achievement in terms of Kindness and develop these beginnings into a more complete model of practice. As a result, my engagement with a discourse including positions of both negative and positive affect, paranoid and depressed positions, and ethics and aesthetics begins here. Reading Stein's 'objects' in terms of Bennett's "thing-power" provides the basis for my argument, while her "political ecology of things" profoundly informs the trajectory of my survey, beginning with Stein and concluding with Reznikoff, that precisely delineates a "grammar of reading" that pursues Kindness.[106] Perhaps one of the most significant contingencies of "thing-power" for reading is a point Bennett considers a "disadvantage" to her thinking, how one problem she must address regarding "thing-power" is that it tends to produce or reduce itself down to individualism:

> While the simplest body or bit may indeed express a vital impetus, conatus or *clinamen*, an actant *never really acts alone* [my emphasis]. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces.[107]

For my purposes, however, this communal quality in the apprehension of the "actant" in fact lends itself to the idea of Attridge's "ideoculture." While I wish to consider the

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[104] I should also note here that Stein is discussed in a different light in chapter 4 when I begin to consider the impact of an "other" or "outsider" identity on verse specifically in the context of Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The'".
[105] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 21.
[106] This is the subtitle of Bennett's *Vibrant Matter*.
[107] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 21.

poem as thing, it is the transactional act of reading that I wish to figure while I explicate Kindness. This is a difficult negotiation to pull off because it would seem to contradict my assertion that the poem is best read, in terms of Kindness as an event. Here is another reason that my reading of Stein is vital to the foundation of Kindness as a "grammar of reading": Stein's poems, I would argue complicate and ultimately collapse the binary of poem as either object or event. In this sense my readings of Stein will allow me to develop a means by which to imagine poems as both object and event. This is a condition that, invites readings of "behaviour" in poetry as distinct from meditations on the efficacy of the poem as cultural, philosophical, or historical artifact. One way of exploring the relationship between Bennett and Stein is the immediately apparent "behavioural" quality of the poet's work, especially in *Tender Buttons*. That is to say, these poems inherently depend on the "actant", what Bennett confronts when she pursues the vibrant materiality she experiences in the drain gutter in Baltimore discussed earlier. While a vibrant materiality manifests in Stein's "objects", the distinction is that Bennett renders that event as an "object" whereas Stein transforms the textual object into a readerly event, a distinction that structures the development of the "grammar of reading" as Kindness for the rest of my thesis.

Perloff proposes that the title *Tender Buttons* "is a kind of Dada joke for, by definition, buttons are not tender", in addition to suggesting that it refers to nipples.[108] While these interpretations are valid and useful, I would go further and suggest the title indicates a certain Kindness of attachment, as well as a human practicality, since a button keeps and protects a coat or triggers a bell on a door. As small objects, buttons are useful because they either perform or help initiate much larger tasks. *Tender Buttons* unfolds time and again with meaning but it never fails to convey connection. Even when abstracted the buttons seem to actively encourage a person to push more buttons, whether physically, emotionally, or intellectually. The reader must wonder, are the buttons themselves tender? Is the act of pushing them tender? But of course "tender" can be not only an adjective, but a verb or a noun. Interpreting "tender" as an adjective has an effect on the reading of the words, chiefly suggesting an opening out in itself that has been discussed as a Cubist phenomenon in language as Perelman points out.[109] This and other aspects of Stein's work, including her own

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[108] Marjorie Perloff, *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage* (Guilford, Surrey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 99.
[109] Perelman, 129

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reflections, mean that there has been considerable scholarship on Stein's Cubism. Perloff is particularly illuminating in her writing on Picasso's *Ma Jolie* and Stein's portrait *Susie Asado*, and in *The Poetics if Indeterminacy* she reads *Tenders Buttons* as anticipating Surrealist art or what Apollinaire describes as "Orphic Cubism", an interpretation I entirely agree with as providing a legitimate way of reading Stein.[110]

The fact of description in a text, it can be argued, seems to offer an invitation to the reader; it implies an investment in the reader's ability and a desire to participate in the substance of the text. Children learn to read that "Jane has a ball" and as they advance they learn that "Jane's ball is red". Stein, however, subverts this invitation to engage by using a term that does not exactly clarify the condition, use or purpose of the word "buttons", not to mention the actual condition, use or purpose of the "buttons" themselves. Whatever the buttons may be, the phrase has the effect of simultaneously drawing the reader in and casting him/her off far and at a pace. The phrase has a great deal of scope for interpretation yet bizarrely never permits one to stray too far from the central notion of connection. As a result, the content is secondary to the sweetened brutality of the syntactical chicane, in fact the content really is this brutality that forces a disjunction in the reader's understanding and emotional response. This sense of disjunction is central to my reading of *Tender Buttons* as that which makes the text at times almost unbearable to read yet also what makes it an essential point of reference in this discussion of Kindness. The readerly disjunction results from Stein forcing the reader to traverse a hitherto unexpected gap in rhythm or meaning as she writes poems that have the explicit effect of forcing space between words and their neighbors and, by extension, their meanings and the reader's understanding of the words themselves. In reading *Tender Buttons*, the reader finds it necessary to be dragged over, under o\r between these gaps, which raises the problem that in dragging the reader through her text, Stein not only reveals the spaces and gaps of that text but also renders them rather terrifying and very much part of her, the poet's, own domain, almost saying enticingly 'enter if you dare'. Theoretically, Stein constructs the stretched out, porous and amorphous poetry that can be seen in some ways to be a definitive example of Kindness as understood in my thesis.

However, whilst making room for this discombobulated invitation to understand, Stein seems to lack an essential vulnerability. This vulnerability is the key

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[110] Perloff, 99-100.

sense in which I define my position on Stein in contrast to the other poets I will focus on here. In not "understanding" a poem, the reader in some way fails to meet a challenge; this implies a type of failure to engage, to either work hard or simply know enough. At this point, vulnerability is assumed to lie solely with the reader in that it is ordinarily accepted to be his/her responsibility to know what the poem "means". This might explain why Perelman points out in *The Trouble With Genius* that the trend in criticism of Stein, but also to James Joyce, Pound and Zukofsky, has been towards translation, how the reader's inability to understand the text partially, wholly or even ideologically is reflective of a flaw in the reader, of a vulnerability that must be compensated for.[111] Discussions on difficulty in poetry in terms of resistance to readerly understanding invite further discussions of "ease" of understanding, an issue quite pertinent to the idea of Kindness. There is an almost contrary imperviousness to *Tender Buttons* as it seems to be a text aimed at resisting understanding while also offering numerous glimpses of objects and phrases. In this sense, the vulnerability in the readerly transaction is located entirely with the reader but it is important to note that vulnerability in the reading experience is not definitively a bad thing, in fact it could be argued that it is Stein's greatest tool and is crucial in the powerful effect her poetic project has had on subsequent poetry in the twentieth century. The destabilizing effect that displaced words have on a reader, it can be argued, forces him/her back to a state of readerly awareness that is in some way prior to the common discovery that "Jane's ball is red."

A poem is often too easily dismissed as "hard poetry" if it appears to offer overtly obscure methods of communication. In Kindness we can consider that the perceived failure to understand the esoteric or avant-garde is in fact a vulnerability and a naïveté that can provide a fruitful reading in itself. The natural, logical next step to the framing of a poem as "hard poetry" would be to assume that the poem is in some way "not kind" in that it cannot be easily understood. Whether or not a poem is worth working on, or indeed if a poem is better if its meaning has to be worked for, will be discussed at a later point, though the answer is probably already apparent given the premise of my thesis. The attempt to reconfigure *Tender Buttons* so that it means something literal is very much beyond the intention and scope of this thesis since it is precisely the deliberately inexplicable and confusing quality of the text I

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[111] Perelman, 8.

aim to examine as a mode of "behaviour" to be found in a poem rather than a barrier put in place by an elitist poet. After all, even if this is the case, there really is not too much point in giving a poem the satisfaction of not being read because it is "too hard" when ultimately the poem has no other form of existence apart from being read.

The tension between resistance to understanding and the effort to understand or know is where the imperative for reparative reading takes hold. Kindness of communication depends precisely on this tension as it emerges in a poem, the implicit tautness it creates permits deep resonance or vibrations which goes some way to impart the binding "grammar of reading" as Kindness to the reader. In this sense, the poem, while being a piece of writing that has been made by a poet, is able in fact to communicate a type of knowledge to its reader that does not necessarily depend on the apparent "meaning" of the words it is composed of. Tension and resistance in language are essential for this type of resonant transference of feeling, which indicates a reparative position. Stein is, therefore, an interesting starting point for this discussion of Kindness because despite the great deal of resistance apparent in *Tender Buttons*, the collection ultimately does not convey the essential tension that is crucial to my concept of poetic Kindness. Rather, her resistance is due to the method of drastic separation of words and meaning, and words from their neighbours, which performs the essential task of making space in language visible. The method of separation I discuss below concerns Stein's use of non-sequiturs -- words that do not immediately semantically relate to their neighbours – as an instance of a vital strategy for making Kindness in poetry apparent.

With *Tender Buttons*, Stein creates an aesthetic which provides a negotiation of the notions of space and ease in language which are ultimately essential to this thesis' presentation of Kindness in poetry. Translation, however, is very tempting and certainly some poems in *Tender Buttons* appear to readily offer up explicit meaning. That is, the clarity of thought that pervades each poem is, in most cases, precisely declared in the stark title of each section. Perloff describes these titles as "false leads", wherein the reader is anchored to the title as he or she traverses Stein's spontaneous, shifting language that seeks to simultaneously confuse and explain.[112] Nonetheless, as I mentioned before, some of the poems seem to stick rather more firmly to the

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[112] Perloff, 102.

original declaration of their titles. Consider the first section from "OBJECTS", for example, which contains:

A PETTICOAT.

A light white, a disgrace, an ink spot, a rosy charm.[113]

The title is a particularly Steinian type of word, while the syntax achieves an oral enactment of the object it describes. The consonants are delicate and connected by light treble vowels. The "e" and the "i" lift up the corners of the mouth and the "tt" come from the front of the teeth, with "P" pursing the reader's lips. The first part of the word suggests a light and decorative kiss. There is a trifling sense of delicacy here and the word is not dissimilar to "pretty." This might suggest a lace edge or a bow but it certainly conforms to what may be considered, albeit tentatively and with the reservations modern thinking on gender maintains, "girlish" or "feminine". Naturally, "coat" suggests cover and 'cloak" and the "oa" is far more expansive than "petti", it is fuller and descends in tone, covering the legs. The main body of the poem expands and plays with the rhythm of the title. The "e" sound is replaced by the "i" of "light" and "white". Its sound is stretched out to be flatter and the tempo is steadied to two beats at the end of "light white", which literally suggests the whiteness of the petticoat itself. The rhythm then rapidly changes and, like the title the poem, is made of more than one part, with commas dividing three syllables, then three, then four. The fourth section implies affection in some way as flowers or pink cheeks and "charm[s]" crest the poem almost jewel like. The poem can easily be read as describing an event, or at least an eventuality, the stain of menstrual blood on underwear, an undeniably female event. Of course knowing what we know about Stein's personal life with Alice B. Toklas influences our reading of the poem. The transference of attitude in the poem suggests persuasion and comfort, a dialogue. The stain is viewed from multiple angles, feelings regarding it are explored and the persuasion affects a change in the poetic existence of the stain, whilst describing it and making clear that that is what is being described and the persuasion indicates affection, as does the rosiness and the "charm." Once again, the "girlishness" and "femininity" found in this scenario is painted pinkish and constrained by "disgrace." Both the subject and the subject matter of the poem then, quite characteristically of Stein, digress and become acts of love or

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[113] Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (New York: Claire Marie, 1914), 22.

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tenderness. It is barely an object at all but a series of feelings denoting a fragmentary memory of closeness. This does not, however, necessarily make it Kind.

Finding Kindness is not a question of sweet feelings being described or expressed in poetry. There is nothing immediately heartwarming about the type of poetic Kindness at stake here since, as a "grammar of reading", it describes an attempt to firmly grip another with language rather than a gentle stroke or caress with rhymes or subjects. In her introduction to *The Public Is Invited To Dance*, Harriet Scott Chessman discusses the dialogue she finds implicit in Stein's poetry:

> In other forms, dialogue takes place not only between the reader and the words, but between the words themselves as they create intimate relationships of sound, sight, and meaning, between the writer and the words, and between the objects they "caress" but do not necessarily signify.[114]

If we look for Kindness in "A PETTICOAT", we may find some remnants of it in the poem's persuasive, multifaceted method of descriptive presentation because it is not too evasive. It does achieve a synthesis of knowledge and understanding but the progression is perhaps not really oblique enough. The disjunctive connection is missing from this poem; it runs too smoothly, rhythmically circling in on itself, so that the gaps are not stark and the rhythm is melodic. Perhaps it is too nice to be Kind because the reader at no point is dragged into the poem itself. It has no major pitfalls of understanding and, therefore, there is nothing to grip. The vulnerable type of communication essential to the theory of poetic Kindness is lacking in this poem precisely because it demands nothing of the reader, it is too insular in its internal dialogue. This is another instance in which I read Stein in order to determine what Kindness is not. Kindness, on the other hand, must be defined as pertaining to an emotional or intellectual transaction that the poem is the grounding for; it is the space in which this essential development takes place.

Another poem from "OBJECTS" that seems to more closely approach this theory of Kindness is entitled "A DOG":

> A little monkey goes like a donkey that means to say that means to say that more sighs last goes. Leave with it. A little monkey goes like a donkey.[115]

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[114] Harriet Scott Chessman, *The Public Is Invited To Dance: Representation, the Body, and Dialogue in Gertrude Stein* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 3.
[115] Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 26.

With the title, Stein declares that she is presenting a dog and it is evident from the poem that she does; it is full of rhythm and fur. Stein performs a weird feat of poetic taxidermy because in writing a dog she writes a type of monster. There are four limbs as the "monkey" and the "donkey" are merged by the non-violent simile "like", and these limbs lurch from having four feet on the ground to two, as the upright two-footed "monkey" and the firmly planted four footed "donkey" swing back and forth for uprightness. The simile suggests a rearing up, a struggle for two feet perhaps presenting the familiar way in which a dog attempts to stand on two feet as it yaps or barks away. This particular unpacking of the subject, the parceling out of visual components, provides an instance of the aforementioned lurch. The "monkey" and the "donkey" at first seem completely incongruous but the space between the two images and the urge to conflate them so they pertain to a dog advances a strange type of understanding. The poem asks the reader to perform the unending struggle that confounds the dog who ceaselessly attempts to upright himself.

The rhythm, however, is affected with a typically Steinian verbal back-step of repetition and breath, "that means to say that means to say that more sighs last goes". This phrase pants; it rears up and yaps. There is a natural crescendo to the expression "that means to say". It fills the reader with the expectation that an explanation, or more precisely a description or clarification will follow, such as "Jane's ball is…", but in this case none is forthcoming. This is perhaps the point, as Stein manipulates the reader's expectation to affect a stilted ascending rhythm and increase his/her consternation. In doing so, she also exposes a consternation in the gap between "meaning" and the verbal "saying". The "that" connecting the repeated phrase instigates a mild sort of panic as neither "that" can be fully extracted and identified as belonging to either phrase. It lends a rapidly acquired sense of inevitability to the second repetition of the phrase, which makes it all the more jarring to read "more". Here the crescendo ceases abruptly; it literally "sighs" in accord with the dog, which seems to have momentarily been exhausted by its efforts. In personifying the dog's yapping, Stein animalizes the language itself and the phrase blurs into nonsense and rhythm with a compelling and forceful manipulation that seems to issue from a frequently used effort to make a dog's bark somehow articulate. She is writing a frustrating and fascinating attempt to communicate a dog's attempt to communicate, where the reader has the sense it is unending because the beginning is repeated at the end. The verb "goes" implies something almost mechanical, like the repetitive motion

of a machine with one job, and so the "little monkey" begins again. With thirty-five syllables and three full-stops, Stein creates the impression of prolonged repetition that implies the seemingly inexhaustible energy of a little dog. The poem has the mechanized efficiency of an automaton, perhaps however, if viewed from this perspective, this is all it actually is. One might say that the ever shifting "Buttons" in the title of the book can be read as the pressing point of action for these automata, the handle or trigger one turns to achieve action, the trigger. The poem, in this sense, could be a delightful or some other brilliant feat of mechanics, a system of cogs that is incredible on first inspection but once the mechanics have been discovered it is no longer quite as astonishingly unsettling or magical as it first appeared.

What always remains remarkable in *Tender Buttons*, however, is how quickly and efficiently Stein affects such huge distortions of the reader's expectations to reduce his/her level of understanding to that of a bark, to an instant of almost non-verbal communication (the bark). Disrupted patterns normally force the reader to lurch, so maybe the problem is Stein has already filled the gaps and anticipated what is in them so the reader cannot succumb to the uncertainty that forces one to clutch for the grasp. Both of the poems examined above can be seen to be in some sense figurative, as each has recourse to a solid easily imagined object through its own linguistic mechanics. There is certainly a theme in *Tender Buttons* that seeks to express a preoccupation with definition and qualification in the negative. This is a method that also has an interesting effect on the reader and can be seen as an example of the paranoid position motivated by negative affect. Definition in negative terms expresses an irrepressible urge to examine things to the apparently arbitrary exclusion of everything else, demonstrated by Stein implying a certain object whilst specifically erasing it from the scene she presents. In doing so, she draws the reader's attention to what an object is not *and* infers a much larger context while also retaining the mirage of the object that is defined by its absence. In this sense, Stein achieves a succinct suggestion of everything. Consider, for example:


DIRT AND NOT COPPER.

Dirt and not copper makes a color darker. It makes the shape so heavy and makes no melody harder.

It makes mercy and relaxation and even a strength to spread a table fuller. There are more places not empty. They see cover.[116]

The title has the effect of combining the "dirt" and the "copper" to the point that the absence of the copper itself seems an impossibility because it is persistently present, it is almost the subject of the poem. That is to say, the declared absence of the copper heightens the reader's awareness of it, making it present in an almost ghostly capacity. The poem is structured around comparison and the oppressive quality of it makes the poem feel as heavy and dense as the earthly mineral the title introduces. There is also a shade of religiosity present in the poem, a dark, foreboding and looming sense of largeness which takes on an almost religious tone when "mercy" appears and the "table" might suggest an altar. Stein, and the potential impact of religion, specifically her Judaism, will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3, chiefly in relation to Zukofsky.

Sedgwick is useful in thinking about this phase in Stein's work. I have already mentioned the automaton quality of the poetic "objects" in *Tender Buttons* and a great deal of my interest in beginning with Stein is the need to address a certain negative affect, a paranoid position that invites or requires me to situate my argument as that which it is not. Nevertheless, this intention is crucial to my argument in favour of reparative readings. Sedgwick speaks of humiliation theory as being attendant to the paranoid position, an affect theory that is, quoting Tomkins, "interest[ed] in minimizing the experience of humiliation" and is best discussed in terms of the tautological outcomes of the paranoid position:

> This is how it happens that an explanatory structure that a reader may see as tautological, in that it can't help or can't stop or can't do anything other than prove the very same assumptions with which it began, may be experienced by the practitioner as a triumphant advance towards truth and vindication.[117]

This explication seems to resonate with Stein's poem-objects, especially in relation to the inherent tautology of the automaton. However, her poems can still be read as avant-garde "explanatory structures" in terms of the uses and acrobatics of syntax entailed in her poetic productions rather than just explaining the "false leads" of their title. To go even further, Sedgwick's statement sets out a "strong" set of perimeters

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[116] Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 13.
[117] Sedgwick, 135; 135.

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with which to task any reparative reading of a poem and thereby allow for a whole series of considerations for Kindness as a "grammar of reading" itself. The aesthetic reparative position that I mean to occupy in my close readings is mediated by and concerned with the ethical consideration that Sedgwick highlights when she refers to the triumph of the practitioner's "advance towards truth and vindication." However, my concern with the "grammar of reading" Kindness is always first and foremost the reader and only then, to some extent, how the reader might cope with the tautologies of the paranoid position.

There is an emotionally emphatic tone in this particular poem as Stein repeats the "er" sound throughout to imply increase; when affixed to an adjective "er" always suggests more. This sound slows the rhythm of the poem as words gain cumbersome tails that taper in momentum, bringing the pace of the poem to a halt. This is clearly intentional as Stein places the "er" words at the end of each of her sentences to create a great deal of weight as "darker", "harder", and "fuller" all suggest an increase of pressure that seems to be confirmed by the last word. "Cover", however, is greatly complicated by its context, "They see cover", which implies hiding from sight, thus making compromising the ability to see properly. This raises the question: do "they see cover" in that they see that things are covered or do "they see cover" in their inability to see anything beyond what is covering them? Is it the cover which covers them, blinding them. Or possibly too, typically playful of Stein, do "They" in fact "see cover" as a means to "seek cover"? Another possible reading of the poem suggests the art of etching, which is by its very nature an art based on negative definition, on the inverse contrast between light and dark. This reading offers a distinct pun on negative affect but perfectly illustrates the centrality of the negative affect as the dominant method of making. That is to say, to make an etched image the artist must scratch away at a copper plate to produce a negative of the image s/he intends. Once the ink is applied to the copper plate and the paper is pressed onto it the indentations remain light, they provide the highlights of the image and the un-scored areas of copper provide the lines and shadows that actually describe the image. "There are more places not empty", therefore, might be read as referring to those areas of copper that carry the ink to produce the image while the scratched down areas that constitute the highlights remain "empty". Their function is to be empty to provide the clear whiteness we visually read as light. Indeed, we might read this poem as negative affect in the act of disavowing negative affect. "There are more places not

empty" seems to resonate with Sedgwick's ideas regarding an alternative to the paranoid position and, I would argue, with Bennett's position of the vital materialist that insists the non-human has vibrancy and details how this should affect our thinking on all experiences.

Most likely, however, Stein is not writing about ink since the title of the poem is "DIRT AND NOT COPPER". While it might be a contention of the "grammar of reading" Kindness that intention does not always matter, Kindness always means to embrace the positive affect of creative readerly experiences, to offer an alternative to the paranoid positions that allow for creative readerly experiences as the space for reparative reading. Rather than etchings, perhaps the poem starts with tarnished metal, with the persistent contrast and comparison in the poem requiring the reader to simultaneously maintain both the object, the dirt, and its point of negative definition, the copper. As Perloff explains, "substances are defined by what they are not, but what they *are* remains open to question. And Gertrude Stein wants it that way because her real subject is change".[118] Perloff seems to be suggesting here that Stein is creating a new type of visibility in her poetry. Equally, the reader might consider "DIRT AND NOT COPPER" as paying homage to housekeeping with its reference to the strength and fortitude required to "spread a table fuller", which opens out into domesticity rather neatly and sketches the relationships between individuals and objects in a typically oblique and yet exposed sense. More generally, however, such linguistic visibility is one that detaches meaning from words and structures phrases around the notion that the meaning of names must be fluid as the reader tries to read vision. So much so that description is not a case of the linear production of expected adjectives or responses but is in fact a constantly shifting attempt to rename or relay something in a familiar language that necessitates the renaming or relaying of everything that surrounds it, thus creating an "other" "explanatory structure" that coincides with Attridge's ideas concerning inventiveness and originality. This indicates exactly how the tension essential to Kindness is lacking. Stein's fluidity of language and the forceful slips of meaning represent a highly liberating slackness that implies her method of language manipulation in fact deviates from the Kindness I aim to elucidate as a "grammar" because the clarity of communication she aspires toward depends on a moment of total opacity. The reader is consequently compelled to

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[118] Perloff, 106.

perform an almost personal act of devotion to the poet herself in an attempt to cleave a new type of meaning to the original, and what Stein may have felt as pedestrian, meaning she has just sliced up, blended and tossed like salad until "It is a winning cake".[119]

Equally important, Stein's preoccupation with negative definitions ought to be read as symptomatic of her being "torment[ed] by the problem of the external and internal", that is, when defining something by using the word allotted to describe it she is further caught by the necessity of explicitly defining it as *not* something else.[120] *Tender Buttons*, therefore, can potentially be read as a poetically performative rendition of the paranoid position, to the extent it suggests that one simultaneously acquiesces to the essential brutality of naming in language and also gives very sharp clear edges to the name one must use for the thing s/he is describing. If language is blurry because it is subjective, then perhaps Stein challenges this by drawing deliberate comparisons as a means to achieve clarity. The lurch mentioned earlier appears here as gaps open up in these comparisons because whilst they articulate an edge they must necessarily articulate a gap between words and objects. This gap is also pertinent to my readings of Pound and especially Williams, but for the moment it seems obvious that Stein knows she is forcing these gaps, doing so deliberately to help further cultivate almost bacterial imaginings for the reader between the words. The poem and its component words become "things", "a culture of things irreducible to the culture of objects", yet Stein does this with such guile and intention it seems an attempt at creating a text-object exhibiting absolutely no vulnerability wherein once the reader has identified the gap they find that it is already filled with further images awaiting their inspection.[121] While Perloff accordingly asserts that "the poet wants us to be able to fill in the gaps in whatever way it suits us".[122] I am not entirely convinced that Stein's intention is quite so diplomatic, unless the option the reader has is to choose from any one of the poet's oblique allusions. In a similar vein, Harriet Chessman describes Stein's project as one that "playfully ask[s] us to question our own desire for dominance".[123] Implicit in the playfulness Chessman identifies is Stein's own desire and perhaps even a certain knowledge of her dominance. The

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[119] Stein, *Tender Buttons*, 57.
[120] Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2001), 130.
[121] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 5.
[122] Perloff, 105-106.
[123] Chessman, 8.

reader may have discovered the "open sesame" function and indeed found the treasured content but it is always one that cannot be touched or possessed because it resolutely remains Stein's.

Reading Sedgwick alongside Stein makes the *in*vulnerability in her apparent, even demonstrating the dramatic pitfalls of the paranoid position to some extent. To the naïve or paranoid reader within this context, it might also follow that here is a reward for being committed and persistent enough to access Stein's submerged layers, eventually receiving a gratifying textual pat on the head if that. Kindness, however, depends much more on a fluid dialogue that progresses between the reader and the poem that is the reward itself. The poem is the arena not the prize, this is central to Kindness as a reparative "grammar of reading". This is fundamental to my positioning of Stein as what Kindness is not or rather that Stein's work in *Tender Buttons* provides a negative definition of Kindness. The reparative position can flourish amongst the hermetic, invulnerable poems in the text. However, the vulnerability of the neophyte, at once flawed and certain is not reflected in these texts and therefore *Tender Buttons* describes what Kindness is not.

One problem for Kindness here is that Stein's type of verbal vision feels somewhat superficial in the sense that *Tender Buttons* is most arresting on its surface, in the necessary struggle to conflate the visual with the verbal that makes the text so powerful and fascinating. However, the implicit challenge in paranoid reading is to reform the visual from the playful scattered language, making it an issue of naming and seeing. There may be no final and definitive images but the shifting nature of the subject of each poem feels as though it is the end goal of each one, while the multidimensional, fractured method of seeing and the reading that circles each subject as the poem effectively settles on reflection so that the reader is left with the persuasive vision of Stein's chronic sort of evasion. The problem with Stein's disjunctive poetic is that once a reader is comfortable with the disjunct it ceases to be difficult; there is no struggle and therefore no further ethical/aesthetical discussion. The struggle to "understand" the poem was the poetic agent that achieved the sense of the grip in the first place because the initial confusion the poem engenders is the primary "actant" in the reading of Stein's work. This is not to say that incomprehension or difficulty in reading are essential to any notion of Kindness but rather to highlight that difficulty and obliqueness can sometimes *seem*, albeit misleadingly, to conform to a sense of Kindness. While it must achieve a level of

thoughtful interaction that plays a part in the work a poem can be valued for, complexity must also belie a further interaction that is beyond playful language to engage the reader in a more aesthetic/ethic reparative moment. In this sense, Stein's Kindness is sometimes fleeting because after the reader has finished bridging the once vertiginous gaps, s/he is left with a completed image-poem that in its wholeness ultimately excludes the reader. The compromises that force Kindness can be considered to ultimately represent aesthetic negative affect, which means the reader either cannot or need not enter the poem's form of understanding since the poem is imbued with the inherent elitism of the paranoid position. This is what I mean by impervious, suggesting that the fragment is implicitly necessary because it represents the nature of Kindness.

Writing on *Susie Asado*, Marjorie Perloff observes that:

> For her verbal configurations are set up precisely to manifest the arbitrariness of discourse, the impossibility of arriving at 'the meaning' even as countless possible meanings present themselves to our attention. […] But it all depends on our angle of vision. [124]

Here Perloff confirms the critical view that, from a paranoid position, would observe that Stein's poetry often dramatizes the reparative position by "depend[ing] on our angle of vision". This is both an aesthetic and ethical observation. This necessary rehabilitation of reading Stein in a reparative sense is largely purpose for establishing a comparison between her and her contemporary compatriots. Gender, religion, location, and position are all crucial to understanding Kindness as a reparative "grammar of reading" in the context of aesthetics and ethics. My intention is not to draw attention to what I consider Stein's evasions in order to negate her achievement but rather to create a detailed contrast between poetry that is so technically fascinating and poetry that goes further towards a notion of Kindness in that the readerly experience is positioned as both aesthetically and ethically reparative. Stein is indeed more than ground-breaking in these areas, possibly even ground-making. In fact, Pound could have been discussing Stein when he wrote that "as for the arts and technique—technique is the means of conveying an exact impression of exactly what one means in such a way as to exhilarate".[125] *Tender Buttons* is certainly an

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[124] Perloff, 76.
[125] Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965,* 33.

exhilarating text in that it offers an exquisite demonstration of the potential of technique and the implications of negative affect. The deeply personal impression that the poems leave as they address a Cubist aesthetic in language are at points moving and amusing at once, resulting in significant impact on and illumination in the reader.

Despite this, the collection lacks complete credulousness because the poems themselves are too self-reflexive to really permit the reader to inhabit them or, alternatively, to be inhabited. They lack the crucial vulnerability that is key to Kindness. Perhaps Stein is so insistently impervious because as a female writer she is more acutely aware of the patriarchal subjectivity of language and, therefore, aware that a position of invulnerability is essential to her as a female writer for reasons of securing an identity. However, the invulnerability found in *Tender Buttons* leads to the conclusion that the text resists Kindness in the foundational sense. This point is not intended to dismiss Stein but, despite the influence of Sedgwick's queer theory, it is the heteronormative, standardization of the paranoid position at this point that generates my readings of her work. Furthermore, there are obvious, gendered implications involved in this discussion of male accessibility to and female preclusion from Kindness. The "other", therefore, will be used to denote that experience which is at odds with the dominant apprehensions and ideologies of the cultural sphere in which it seeks to exist. This concern constitutes the ethical cornerstone of the entire thesis and fundamentally informs the question to be addressed in the next chapter; namely what affects the potential for Kindness in a poem and where might we find it? This is a question that necessarily gestures toward significant political, gendered, racial and ethical commitments.

# Chapter 2: Aesthetic Agency, and "Behaviour": A discussion through Pound and Williams

It is generally considered reductive and rarely useful to discuss a poet's intention, even though some form of intention is always implicit in any poem or reading. Rather, we discuss "what poets or poems do", making it an issue of efficacy. This facilitates addressing a text from a paranoid position as it removes the potential for the reader to be incorrect about an individual poet's personal motives. A discussion of efficacy, however, implicitly establishes a set of criteria against which to examine a poem because it exists *a priori* to the poem itself. Likewise, the aesthetic/ethic discussion that I propose seems to rely on some *a priori* ethical and aesthetic ideals. In the previous discussion of Stein I demonstrated how that the reparative position, with its recourse to creative close reading and complicated relationship with negative and positive affect, serves as a platform from which to identify Kindness in poetry. The discourse is contingent upon the singularity with which a poem brings the "other" into view and is, as a result, unavoidably ethic/aesthetic but the remains regarding how to discuss the efficacy of a new kind of achievement, how to identify Kindness, when it represents a position that is fundamentally suspicious of the paranoid position. Regarding this problem, Bennett explains how "efficacy points to the creativity of agency, to a capacity to make something new appear or occur", which coincides with Attridge's notion of singularity.[126] The term "creativity of agency" suggests something similar to his idea that literature is fundamentally in a correspondence with the reader's ideoculture, the ability to form meaning within a given bodies of knowledge.

Rather than discussing intention, therefore, it is more useful to think about agenda, which seems to account for efficacy within a discussion that does not wish to impose paranoid interpretations of intentionality onto a poem. The agenda of a poem

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[126] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 31.

can only reasonably be derived from the naturally occurring subjectivity of language itself. This approach is supported by how Bennett theorizes efficacy and intentionality in terms of the "actant", or more specifically a "swarm of vitalities", when she discusses the implications of intention within assemblages, using "swarm" to indicate the multiplicity of powers that affect any one assemblage. [127] As she further explains:

> To figure the generative source of effects as a swarm is to see human intentions as always in competition and confederation with many other strivings, for an intention is like a pebble thrown into a pond, or an electrical current sent through a wire or neutral network: it vibrates and merges with other currents, to affect and be affected. This understanding of agency does not deny the existence of that thrust called intentionality, but it does see it as less definitive of outcomes. It loosens the connections between efficacy and the moral subject, bringing efficacy closer to the idea of the power to make a difference that calls for a response. [128]

Bennett's assertion that "an intention is like a pebble thrown in a pond" has many useful implications for how I hope to read Kindness. Vital materialism is contingent upon the idea that the affect of anything is at once from the assemblage of intention that provoked it but also is a separate and compelling assemblage of its own. This expression resonates with what D.H. Lawrence writes in his essay "Poetry of the Present". Allegorising the vitality and unfinished-ness and nature of contemporary poetry, he reads poetry as having a similar function to the reflective quality of water, since it is never static but always moving and evolving its quality of reflection, as verse "the waters are shaking the moon". [129] Efficacy is bound up in reading but I aim to pursue a new way of reading efficacy itself that does not require the text, or object, to be placed between established criteria and examined on those grounds. Rather, the "grammar of reading" is concerned with momentary incidents of ethical and aesthetic compromise from a reparative position. It is necessary, therefore, that I establish a term that can account for this "grammar". "Behaviour" does so succinctly as it allows me to account for the "actant" reading of a poem as "actant" and for the oscillations

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[127] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 32

[128] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 32.

[129] To quote Lawrence more extensively: "But there is another kind of poetry: the poetry of that which is at hand: the immediate present. In the immediate present there is no perfection, no consummation, nothing finished. The strands are all flying, quivering, intermingling into the web, the waters are shaking the moon. There is no round, consummate moon on the face of running water, nor on the face of the unfinished tide." D. H. Lawrence, "Poetry of the Present" from, D. H. Lawrence, *Selected Critical Writings,* ed. and intro. by Michael Herbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 76.

between aesthetics and ethics in the "depressed position" as one seeks to avoid commodifying "what a poem does" as a means of controlling readerly critical experience of the poem/object itself.

To use "behaviour" to discuss the modes and meanings of a poem has a distinctly anthropomorphic bent. It follows Bennett's own tribulations with vibrant materiality that aim to recognize the non-human as being just as vibrant and efficacious as the human without recourse to a hierarchy of human-ness. She concludes *Vibrant Matter* by declaring she "believe[s] that encounters with lively matter can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight[ing] the common materiality of all that is, expos[ing] a wider distribution of agency, and reshap[ing] the self and its interests".[130] "Behaviour" takes its cue here from Bennett's term "lively matter" and similarly serves to permit readings that "chasten fantasies of human mastery" and "expose a wider distribution of agency". This is the ethical goal of the term "behaviour" which responds to what Woods has discussed the "master-slave" dynamic in Imagist writing and, indeed, in conceptions of this group's influence on the Objectivists. "Behaviour", therefore, will be used to reparatively expand readings to renegotiate these histories and the attendant ethical dilemmas for readers today. Every reader's own readerly experience necessarily behaves within the framework of his or her own "ideoculture" and in this sense the correspondence of a poem with a reader's "ideoculture" has a "behaviour" that Kindness seeks to pursue, validate, and ultimately theorise.

If we ascribe an agenda to the language in a poem then we might approach a notion of agency, by which I mean to describe the direction and un-divulged "meaning" to be found in the words that make up a poem. The word meaning from here on in will not be in inverted commas because it always implies a type of vulnerability in the sense that it represents a striving to affect communication, which, according to my theory of Kindness, will be shown to accommodate naïveté. As previously discussed, for naïveté to be a relevant position from which to engage with a poem it must in some sense account for meaning, which implies intention on the part of the poet or the reader. In this vein, as Pound and Williams declare their projects to relate directly to communication, they expose their verse to the reader as s/he finds the opportunity to interact with the poem and grasp the poet's

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[130] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 122.

communication. Consequently, meaning suggests a transaction that is notably different from the transaction present in poetic Kindness as we understand it from a paranoid position to be the responsibility of the reader to understand the poet's meaning. However, as this "meaning" is the product of the interpretation of words that are meant to construct it itself, I would argue that the agency identified is an aesthetic one, thus demonstrating how reading Kindness in poetry depends on the process of reading a poem's aesthetic agency as a component of the poem, as one aspect of its "behaviour".

Before addressing Pound and Williams, it is necessary to remember that in critical reading we often attempt to extract words from the rhythms they create, as words naturally imply meaning; and also that rhythm does this too and when one (semantic meaning) acts upon the other (semantic rhythm) then we have a poem. However, when a poem expresses the tension of communication that I have argued is essential to Kindness, the interplay between the words and their rhythm is necessarily taut. It may be harmonious or jarring but it must be taut because that rhythm is used to stretch out the word, to enhance the gaps between the words and the gap between the words themselves and their presupposed "meaning". However, the subject is poetry and reading words independently of rhythm (or vice versa) will not help us progress because synthesis is key to aesthetic agency. The modernist dedication to the presentation of the thing denotes some significance to the subject or, perhaps more specifically, the object of the poem, which is not to be confused with the intention. This reading of Kindness intends neither to ignore the implications of the individual words in each poem nor to ignore the problematic notion of "universal truth". The emphasis of this analysis will always be the reading of each poem, the system of writing or "explanatory structure" that initiates this reading.[131] In this case, the reader's portion of the poem is key to discovering the poem's Kindness because it is the connection and the urge to communicate that defines my notion of kindness and the poem must be able to reparatively communicate with the reader in order to be read in any way as kind. This is the idea behind "behaviour".

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[131] Sedgwick, 135.

# The problematics of "the direct treatment of the 'thing.'"

As the arbiters of aesthetic agency, words shape what inhabits the spaces between them and Pound is very clear regarding this view on restrained word use. Zukofsky described Pound's mania for accuracy in poetry as being indicative of a system of morality on his part, noting how "he has treated the arts as a science as that their morality and im-morality become a matter of accuracy and inaccuracy".[132] Such a proposition is also true for Williams, whose advocacy of "ridding the verbiage" is synonymous with, if not entirely constitutive of, modernist American poetry.   In Pound and Williams, the presentation of the thing itself is key and this analysis is concerned with dissecting and rehabilitating what exactly the implications of this modernist "thing" are. To this end, Bennett's ideas of "lively matter" and "thing-ness" as assemblages and actants that exists theoretically as unencumbered opportunities for reading will be utilized throughout.

In his essay "The Serious Artist", Pound continues to advance his theories regarding the essential similarity between poetry and science, an analogy that becomes illustrative as he vehemently critiques poets who do not produce poetry conforming to his notion of "good art". The extreme importance he attaches to "good art" even results in him advising that "bad" poets ought to be punished. The governing rule of poetry is precision, endorsing "the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising agent for a new soap".[133] The implied deception in the "way of an advertising agent" is not a secondary meaning since Pound feels that anything present in a poem other than faithful presentation is deceit, thus justifying the notion of a faithful and precise presentation in his science analogy. The analogy of science is very useful in Pound's argument because it allows him to circumvent the fact that it seems to be dependent on the idea that the poet himself has an almost god-like knowledge of human nature.  In effect, this means there are "universal truths" about humanity and existence that must be, and indeed *can* be, quantified by a poet if only he is precise enough in his presentation. This particular approach if at least tempting if not entirely persuasive because the aesthetic is effectively enshrined or sanctified as

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[132] Louis Zukofsky, *Prepositions +: The Collected Critical Essays,* Foreword by Charles Bernstein, Additional prose ed. and intro. by Mark Scroggins (Hanover, N H: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 68.
[133] Pound, *Literary Essays*, 6.

the ethic. Pound's certainty that omniscience can be achieved through poetic means is reassuring and unifying in a real aesthetic sense. The unifying quality derives from security in the assumption that there is one truth about anything and that, most importantly, it can be known. The aesthetic, according to Pound, becomes doctrinal because as the concept of "universal truth" becomes dangerously ignorant in intellectual terms, it indicates the idea that human experience must unify the emotional spirit of everyone. This is, of course, a totalitarian perspective but is significantly not a paranoid one, a fact that provides the momentum for Pound's project and his belief in such certainties which motivate his reductions. According to his Imagist ideology, if one thing is true and the language, image and rhythm used to represent it are clear enough, we must be to completely understand each other, to meet at a point of "universal truth" where the impossibility of unmediated communication has been remedied.

In "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", Pound locates a large portion of the obfuscation in poetry to the diminishing gravitas of contemporary culture. Poem III begins:

> The tea-rose tea-gown, etc.
> Supplants the mousseline of Cos,
> The pianola "replaces"
> Sappho's barbitos.[134]

Not only are the "tea-rose" and the "tea-gown" dilutions of nature and garments of frivolity but the "etc" also evinces the corrupting influences that have replaced a more significant and perhaps more authentic vista of objects and images. In this scene, the fabric of society has literally been diluted as the vague and throw away "etc" reveals. Pound uses this abbreviation to illustrate a type of language that need not indicate anything specific yet should be understood to indicate all; it provides a kind of impotent allusion that dilutes knowledge and inhibits understanding. Likewise, music has been subjected to the degeneracy of trifling pianolas. By placing "replaces" in the inverted commas as he does, Pound highlights the absurdity of this replacement, indeed the impossibility of it. The inverted commas have the effect of sticking the words onto the verse, emphasizing the purely superficial nature of the replacement itself; "Sappho's barbitos" cannot be replaced. This verse demonstrates the type of

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[134] Pound, *Personæ*, 186.

"universal truth" Pound pursues and the point at which it is revealed amid the classics. It is an example of Pound's project of excavating "universal truths", a process that necessitates the tossing aside of the frivolities of Victorian culture almost back to what he considers a more universally visual and referential language of understanding. However, it is evident that Pound's "universal truth" is clearly subjective and compromised, defined by certain attainments in culture and ideologies of class, economics, gender, and race.

The tension between the word and understanding in Pound's poetry, quite unlike in Stein's, acts as a pull from the inside out. That is, Pound's agenda is located within language itself as his belief in the scientific potential of a poetic "universal truth" is constantly submerged in murky language, meaning that his insistence on clarity is part of an attempt to *expose* the universal *with* precise language. It is important to remember Sedgwick's assertion about the paranoid position at this point, how it "places its faith in exposure." She elaborates further:

> Whatever account it may give of its own motivation, paranoia is characterized by placing, in practice, an extraordinary stress on the efficacy of knowledge per se—knowledge in the form of exposure.[135]

This offers a different slant on Stein's paranoia by refuting one aspect of a paranoid reading of Stein, in an epistemological way at least. The opposite of the syntactical progressions of Stein's "explanatory structures" in her poems/objects demonstrate that the negotiation may be deeply concerned with notions and expandable functions of communication, yet the clarity Stein achieves defers the certainty of knowledge and instead mobilizes the "actant" experience. Pound however, works with or claims to deal in clarity and precisions of *exposure* of knowledge, which explains the gaps in his work, the points at which the reader can grip the extended act of communication and know what the poem *means* provided they already know the poem's own ideoculture. This also indicates Pound's manic enthusiasm, to use David Herd's term, which can be read as a vulnerability in his verse because his project has an urgency designed to forge a dependable and irrefutable form of poetic communication.[136] A desire for *exposure* truly motivates Pound so a reparative reading must navigate his rampant esotericism and complicate this further.

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[135] Sedgwick, 138.

[136] David Herd, *Enthusiast! Essays on Modern American Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

Music plays a huge part in Pound's theories about what constitutes "good" poetry. He advises the poet to think constantly of music in his or her composition. That is, Pound condones a fluid approach to rhythm so that the form of verse may follow meaning and thereby achieve a poetic synthesis. This, in turn, permits a more thorough and substantial flow of understanding between the reader and the poem. In effect, then, the musical rhythm of a poem provides a more human and verbal context so that the "meaning" of the words themselves may be drawn into clearer relief as they are imbued with a more recognizably human rhythm. Pound's writing on "*LOGOPŒA,*" which he describes as "the dance of the intellect among words", is fitting in this context.[137] Music, as Pound understands its influencing of poetic rhythm, is the means by which the respectively essential and precise language that is instinctive and clear, and the nuanced development of understanding that must be achieved in a poem, can combine.

Pound's *Lustra* contains a poem that demonstrates these on musicality and meaning. It conforms to a traditional narrative of illicit love being disturbed in the morning and takes inspiration from the Alba form found in poetry from the Troubadour tradition Pound was so drawn to and indeed an expert in:

> As cool as the pale wet leaves
>          of lily-of-the-valley
> She lay beside me in the dawn.[138]

"Alba" is focused entirely on the situation it describes; the syntax and rhythm of the poem seem to encircle each other so as to inhabit one space and one time. The metaphor on which the poem hinges relies on that which is present in the poem, "the pale wet leaves". The image of the poem is entirely self-reflective, the object mirrors the object metaphor so there is no departure, only the instant of the moment. The poem, of course, adheres to a sense of musicality and the lambent "L" achieves a diminuendo in the title; the "A" sound is softened from its necessarily forceful beginning through the soft, front of the mouth and rarely combined "LB" to a softer, quieter "A". The word forms a gentle exhaling repetition, the A reappears as a softer echo of the first that forms the breath of the poem. The beginning, the "A's" metaphor, is lengthened by the "L", the "T" and the "S" of the "wet leaves", adding a

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[137] Ezra Pound, *How To Read* (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1931), 25.
[138] Pound, *Personæ*, 112.

texture to the sound that peaks the rhythm naturally. The second part of the first line nuzzles into the hyphenated "lily-of-the-valley", where the mirroring of the double "L"s forms an almost heart-shaped rhythm, rising twice in two soft places. While the final line echoes the exhalation of the title. In this sense, the poem can be read less as a departure and more as a return. The high musicality of the sounds in the poem is entirely reflective, as the synthesis of form and content perform an act not unlike precision of presentation. Naturally, the tones are pleasurable and the mood is clear but their duty is to *be* the instant that they shape; they are not decorative story-telling but are meant to embody the story because they are in service of the moment and they cohere with the object. The syntax is a wonderful example of a cohesion of meaning and sound; the poem and its moment are tangible.

The poem, the syntax and its aesthetic focus entirely on the object or the moment they describe to the exclusion of all other considerations. The poem barely begins or ends and its fragmentary nature renders it fluid and oddly porous, just like, if you will, human nature. Consequently, it is significantly vulnerable because it is impervious. The reader will discover nothing; he or she must inhabit the poem as it offers a moment of music and meaning tethered together by an image. The apparent lack of conceit, journey or moral in fact presents the reader with a moment of pure interaction. The poem forges, therefore, a moment of communication as the reader is immersed in the moment of the text, relying not only on his or her inherent ability to sense meaning from musicality or to understand the layering of language, but on his/her ability to inhabit the moment in-between the words. It is unarguably an aesthetic, or formalist triumph in free verse because it lends itself to reparative reading, yet to an extent, it is an epistemologically and ethically charged work of art. Its very nature as a poem in the "alba" tradition frames it as a classical portion of a narrative that the initiated will know but its gorgeous aestheticism still delivers an equally vibrant object to an uninitiated reader.

Pound appears to be attempting to account for and accommodate his perception of the uninitiated reader, or indeed the neophyte in his discussion on the Chinese Ideogram as informed by Ernest Fenollosa's "The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry", Pound sets forth a new aim for poetry and expounds a new method. Taking what he believes to be the construction method of the Chinese character, he discusses its description through depiction of objects as nouns. That is, he focuses on the explicitly pictorial, visually representative aspect of the ideogram.

He goes on to investigate how this method may treat more complex or general ideas but he begins, with red. Pound writes:

> He puts (or his ancestor put) together the abbreviated pictures of
>
> ROSE                     CHERRY
>
> IRON RUST                FLAMINGO
>
> (…)
> The Chinese "word" or ideogram for red is based on something everyone KNOWS.[139]

Pound's notion of what everyone "KNOWS" is quite complex and troubling, as it seems not only to inform but also structure "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," a work that struggles with culture whilst drowning or dripping in it, depending on what one knows. However, a distinction between Pound's and Williams's method can be drawn that suggests the latter's focus is at the point of distinction by attending to the physical edges of things that make contrast relief. Musicality is also used to define shape and give physical structure to the image. In contrast, Pound seems to pursue a method that seeks to define the *content* of colour rather than sketch it out by its edges. Pound's form is much more amorphous around the edges than Williams's is but it is still engaged in a project that sculpts and strives to meet with and synthesise with the substance. However, according to a reading of Kindness, both projects can be read in a reparative way that will accommodate naïveté and further explore the aesthetic implications of their dubious ethical positions to find examples of Kindness in reading even within the totalising ideologies of certainty.

Therefore, despite its seminal musicality "Alba" demonstrates in its experiential deliciousness a delightful moment of reading, however the vague compromise of aesthetics and ethics in its "behaviour" presents a problem for Kindness. It tempts Kindness to embrace the paranoid position in its crisp execution; it is to all appearances positive affect because Kindness must address the aesthetic implications of the paranoid *specialite de la maison* negative affect – the strong theory. To investigate this further, I will discuss Pound's 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' and William's *Spring and All*, which both grapple with the purpose of poetry and the oppression, or death, of culture in projects that burst with the energy to create

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[139] Pound, *ABC of Reading*, 8-9.

something legitimate and strong according to the paranoid motive. Both texts also develop a force of language, or aesthetics, that privileges clarity and thus encourage the reader to do his or her best to engage with the poem itself. This is a strange and jealous kind of sharing based on exposure and mere suggestion, and which represents the vulnerability that I have argued is essential to the foundational structure of Kindness.

## *Spring and All*: **The edges and imagination, and ideoculture**

Williams's *Spring and All* begins with a weary, rather lackadaisical shrug, as if he is about to try something but has nothing specific in mind, "If anything of moment results—so much the better".[140] Time is stopped, stretched and tested by this phrase. To understand it properly, the reader must re-understand the meaning of "moment" itself or more accurately, the poetic moment that is a plane, an instant. Attridge's comments on the singular moment in literature are useful here, explaining that when the "other" is brought about, into and through the "ordinary". This notion also has a valence with Bennett's apparently unanticipated moment, "a nameless awareness of […] impossible singularity".[141] Williams begins to demonstrate this by using an unsettling and unfamiliar syntax. A more familiar word order may read "If anything results of the moment" but this obviously means something completely different from what is actually said in *Spring and All*. "Moment" forces a new and broader meaning. Ordinarily, it refers to time or represents a subjective quantity as a method of describing the experience of time. "Of", however, is an odd preposition for "moment". Something can certainly be "of the moment" but the use of "of" in this instance reconfigures the meaning of "moment." The formation is indeed "singular". "Moment" can also logically be read as alluding to the "momentous", which prefigures the drama of *Spring and All* and the dark, mirthless tone that emerges at points in the text.

Rather than the usual "moment of madness", for example, Williams creates a space in time/poetry/reading that is only "moment"; It is not *a* specific "moment". The "moment" is an expansion of meaning, a pocket created where time, subject,

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[140] Williams, *Imaginations*, 88.
[141] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 4.

reality and experience are all paramount so that the word is no longer a tool with which to denote a certain small amount of time. Instead, it represents a poetic demand for the opportunity of experience, that is, it acknowledges the experimental nature of *Spring and All* as a text. This "moment" establishes a level of reading that forces open all communication as it identifies the significance of the space and time of meaning. A reparative reading might prescribe in this case a reading that encourages the reader to consider the poem most emphatically in their own "ideoculture", to acknowledge the significance of the space and time of meaning. Williams goes on to develop a sense of the gap that the "moment" understands and use it in an attempt to navigate the issues this raises:

> There is a constant barrier between the reader and his consciousness of immediate contact with the world. If there is an ocean it is here. Or rather, the whole world is between: Yesterday, tomorrow, Europe, Asia, Africa, --all things removed and impossible, the tower of the church at Seville, the Parthenon.[142]

Williams is addressing the impossibility of communication not only between people but also within people, implicitly referring to language itself. However, in identifying the gulf or "barrier" between a person and his or her experiences, Williams is describing a language that is more than mere communication between people. The language that complicates and inhibits complete knowledge is limited on an internal level. Williams is referring here to the language in which we speak to ourselves, a language that structures and defines our understanding because it is all we have, while also necessarily diluting any "immediate contact with the world". Williams identifies the pervasive power such a limiting language has over readers. It functions as a pre-emptive measure for recognising the poet's disruption of the regular patterns of communication when he writes of the potential results of "moment", "And so much the more likely will it be that no one will want to see it". Here is an expression of anxiety about his reader and the demands that are necessary to make of a reader. The anticipation that the lengths s/he will have to go to in disrupting language in order to approach what the Imagist would consider "good poetry" will in fact act as a deterrent to the reader. The apparent concern is that the project may not come to fruition because it will not find the appropriate reader to participate, thus serving as a

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[142] Williams, *Imaginations*, 88.

confounding, paradoxical catalyst to a project that strives to expand the limits of communication for a reader that will reject that reading.

Apart from the more obvious aesthetic differences, this provides an instance of significant correlation with *Tender Buttons*, where Stein writes an internalized version of the verbal vision addressing the "problem of the external and internal"[143]. However, the distinction to be made here is that Williams foregrounds the expansion and distortion of language in order to achieve "moment" or, as I would term it, direct communication of the thing/moment in his project. Therefore, by reading the poetry, the reader is in some way responding to Williams's tacit invitation to participate in the project. This helps to explain an aspect of the vulnerability of *Spring and All* in contrast to the imperviousness of *Tender Buttons*, that is, the former is in part constructed by the poem's own struggle with the inefficacy of language, it is built by its own attempts and failings to negotiate, convey and explain even though its systems are necessarily and dramatically exposed.

In the course of *Spring and All*, Williams more than once asserts that "only the imagination is undeceived".[144] Imagination serves a huge purpose in Williams's project as it is a term frequently used to describe the arena of human thought that must be utilised in order to engage communication in culture, or the singular within "ideoculture". American-ness and culture are a concern throughout the text but this aspect will be examined later. The wealth of reference and the space that imagination provides the individual is Williams's only ally in his investigation of the "moment" as it is the imagination that the poem must inhabit and affect post communication, after or whilst it is being read. It represents the point at which the poet or indeed the poem should meet the reader, where imaginations can achieve a form of union or cohesion that will allow understanding of the moment to be achieved. Yet the imagination is a terrifying and wonderful opponent that cannot be harnessed due to its vastness. As Williams writes:

> o meagre times, so fat in everything imaginable! imagine the New World that rises to our windows from the sea on Mondays and on Saturdays—and on every other day of the week also. Imagine it in all its prismatic colourings, its counterpart in our souls—our souls that are great pianos whose strings of

[143] Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 130.
[144] Williams, *Imaginations*, 93.

honey and of steel, the divisions of the rainbow set twanging, loosing on the air great novels of adventure! Imagine the monster project of the moment[145]

Here is the necessary expansion the "moment" provides, the essential pocket of imagination that Williams describes to reveal the vast area—a "monster project— each person has at his/her disposal and that responds to the world as it is experienced.

"Imagine" is all that one can do to engage "the monster project of the moment". The prospect is vertiginous because the world as it is experienced is necessarily mirrored through personal lenses ("ideocultures") and, because it has "its counterpart in our souls", it dauntingly spirals and reverberates around the imagination as this individual and shared space is conceptualised in part as "moment". But this constantly shifting and growing arena, the imagination, is where one can find a sense of reliability. It is the human facility to digest experiences and this process creates and is likewise created by the imagination. This almost pre-verbal but still necessarily translatable reality is the locus of one's humanity when it comes to communication. It is the *a priori* understanding of efficacy from the paranoid position. This reflects my earlier point that there must be tension between language and meaning in order to achieve a reading of Kindness in a poem so that reparative reading of this tension can allow for the binding "grammar of reading" that represents Kindness. Most importantly, it is imagination that Williams identifies as the ultimate target for poetry. Rather than merely aim merely to stimulate the imagination, the goal is to communicate with the imagination and thereby allow a more comprehensive type of imaginative communication, a more compromised type of knowledge or truth.

One of the points Williams begins with is colour as a deceptively simplistic poetic substance that might be conducted, like electricity, to achieve a shared communication. Resonances with Bennett's "electrical current through a wire" are apparent here. [146] As *Spring and All* wrestles with itself, the verse bursts forth from tracts of prose as though Williams is waging a tactical war on the problem of the poem. The verse is loaded with the pressures of the torments of the prose yet the poems still serve as a steam valve too, slicing up the pace and discursiveness of the prose. In a manner similar to Pound's work on colour, Williams uses flowers, or petals, as objects from which to start an investigation into shared imagination.

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[145] Williams, *Imaginations*, 90.
[146] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 32.

<blockquote>
The place between the petal's<br>
edge and the[147]
</blockquote>

This excerpt from the poem beginning "The rose is obsolete" forms a working example of the problem that tantalises and torments Williams throughout *Spring and All*. In an effort to shore up his hunch that there is a gap between meaning and understanding that is flooded by imagination, Williams takes his discussion and his poems to the edge of the gap and thus to the edge of the object. Petals in both Williams's and Pound's work serve as naturally occurring splotches of colour, as phenomena that explain the painterly way that we see things in our imaginations in a poetic sense and as "true" and "real" points of agreement.

Colour also implies a block, which is a space that is not empty yet not necessarily filled. In general, there is an understanding of colour even if it only extends to the understanding that there are – for instance – innumerable shades of something we would call "blue." Colour is at once a substance and yet must be applied to an object to have substance. In this sense, colour is colour and a petal is a daub of colour, a fragment of real colour. The petal then provides a plane upon which the pursuit of certain understandings and synchronicities of feeling may occur. The verse, the text itself, falls away at the "edge" of the petal. Williams creates a linguistic representation of the physical edge of the petal itself, blurring the imaginative line between the object and the language describing it. This is how the petal is imbued with the sense of the poetic plane, its physical edges disrupt the poem until it becomes a strange combination of the physically present and the linguistically presented. The explicit presence of the urge to achieve communication, or at least to finally harness language to this end, marks Williams's syntactical synthesis as different from Stein's.

It might be argued that Williams is directly addressing Stein's orgasmic affirmation in "Sacred Emily" that "Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" when he claims "The rose is obsolete".[148] Without wishing to impose intentionality on Williams's phrase, we might just compare the two terms in relation to the paranoid position. The phrases articulate arcs of thinking that in turn describe the paranoid arc. The weak/strong and positive/negative affect of Stein's line can be read in its negotiation

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[147] Williams, *Imaginations*, 108.
[148] Stein, Gertrude, *Geography and Plays* (Boston: The Four Seas Press, 1922), 187; Williams, *Imaginations*, 107.

of epistemological ideals through language. Her phrase seemingly engages with endless alternatives as a means to present a whole, whereas Williams' positions the argument through an assertion of decisive negative affect, where understanding is not based on experiential understanding of "rose" but on critical, defensive destruction of the rose itself. The result is negative affect, yet it has a quality of vulnerability that Stein's line does not because it is predicated upon certainty. It has the inherent vulnerability that necessarily motivates the paranoid position because it is invested in its own certainty. In this syntactical act of containment that Williams enacts, he demonstrates that it is essential the rose can be known and preserved, that it can be presented in poetry. This in turn renders not only the physical rose "obsolete" but makes the positive affect of Stein's epistemologically unanchored rose also "obsolete".

Earlier in the second poem of *Spring and All*, Williams makes an effort to work up a colour substance. At this moment, meaning, movement, and music converge to bring the shifting quality of colour to the point of tangibility in the imagination:

> Pink confused with white
> flowers and flowers reversed
> take and spill the shaded flame
> darting it back
> into the lamp's horn
>
> petals aslant darkened with mauve
>
> red where in whorls
> petal lays its glow upon petal
> round flamegreen throats[149]

Colour features in *Spring and All* as a point from which to begin a synthesis of the reader's imagination, that is, the poem attempts to communicate knowledge as efficiently as possible. "Pink confused with white" activates the starting point whereby colours become the poetic substance so that they are stimulated not just in the reader's imagination but as they appear as available objects themselves just like the colours. This represents an effected compromise. The word "confused" is a convenient example of an argument for Kindness as it rings so truly human; it is

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[149] Williams, *Imaginations*, 96.

fallible and vulnerable in its very nature and has various immediate meanings. It is important to note, however, that Kindness in this context does not depend on poetic ambiguity, far from it in fact. One aspect of kindness can be defined as an attempt to eradicate ambiguous vaguery in poetry whilst capturing the ambiguity of the human experience. Perhaps the pink is so pale that it can be confused with or mistaken for white. It might have been mixed up with the white or blended, creating confusion that forces the colours to be seen together as acting upon each other as well as registering the act of viewing the colours.

There is also action in the line, as the reading of it depends on how the reader interprets "confused", i.e. as either a passive or an active verb. Therefore, the colour and specific colours in the line are inverted, they work in on themselves and become animate until they assume a physical presence. But where is the Kindness in the confusion? It is present in the combination of the bumbled emotionality of the human "behaviour" of colour. This lies in the fact that colour and colours themselves appear in practically infinite varieties. They shift and gravitate depending on mood and feeling. The physical presence of the colours must similarly be worked up in the imagination and, once worked up, are engaged in confusion. Therefore, the phrase can be seen demanding a highly interactive type of reading. The second line takes on a kaleidoscopic dimension as the reader is bombarded with flowers that eclipse meaning, becoming simply objects or content. The kaleidoscope engages the reader in looking as the poet endeavours to display the image he writes. The poem is deeply concerned with the gaze itself and, as it constantly redirects the imaginative eye, conducts the eye and, therefore, the imagination of the reader, who becomes aware of the poem in his or her imagination. A form of imaginative synthesis is achieved and an instinctive knowledge and understanding can be brought about by this type of reading. It is important to note, however, that this function of the readerly experience might well be sourced in the illusively ambiguous use of general colours. However, the real purchase of this experience is in the action of the poem on its own substance. That is, actions that render the poem "confused" and "reserved", such the use of repetition or the mode the form assumes when presenting the colour. This is one way to describe what I mean by the "behaviour" of the poem, the "actant" of meaning that is unavoidable to the Kindness perceptible in Williams. The poet's red appears in the poem as though it were light, it is undefined due to the lower case of its letters. The rest of the line operates with distinct musicality, "where in whorls." The "wh" sound

brings the mouth to a pout that is circular and engages the lips, there is a physicality, therefore, to the red that is distinguished by the sound and might even referring to the lips uttering. "Whorls" begin to sketch out a shape, or at least a form as the red is synthesised with the reader's mouth. The instinctive understanding of "red" as it blossoms in the musical, orally physical phrase, means it is impasto, it is both painterly and physical because it is musical.

In conclusion, it is immediately apparent that there are various exact criteria for reading kindness. The Poundian "direct treatment of the thing" is essential and certainly, at this point in the thesis at least, is the most important element to be found in this "grammar of reading". Of similar significance is the notion of vulnerability in a poem, how in order to be read as Kind a poem must engage the reader in its very substance. The poem must invite an intuitive reading that forces the limits of understanding to the point that the reader is compelled to engage with his/her own understanding in his/her reading. This is interactive and crucial. The space that a poem makes by forcing language apart provides the intellectual and emotional space for the reader to understand and question his/her own limits of understanding. At this point, the poem is dealing precisely with the improbability of communication in language and attempting to forge some kind of plane upon which the reader may engage in this improbable communication. "Behaviour" is central here as it is a term that serves to accommodate all of these functions, without distressing the poem. It is a notion that allows us to characterise the poem in reparative reading as "actant" and efficacy, but always with considerations of the ideograph and within a considered relationship between the aesthetical and the ethical. The focus of these last two chapters has been the working through of the key terms and themes that will inform the textual analyses in subsequent chapters. Questions surrounding difficulty and ease in poetry, the issue of urgency in communication, and how these elements can be read as a means to construct a working model for Kindness in poetry will remain central to the discourse. The following chapter will concentrate in much more detail on the works already mentioned by Pound and Williams in more detail to foreground the apparent disparities between each poet's work and address the significance of aesthetic motifs as they appear in each text. From these, certain conclusions will be drawn regarding Kindness and there will also be a discussion of the ethical considerations involved the notions of American-ness and Eurocentricity each poet explores. The poetic, as opposed to the explicitly political, agenda as informing the

agency of the poem itself will prove a significant point of discussion as the texts can be read as responses to the cultural climate in which they were conceived. In short, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" and *Spring and All* will be read side by side as a means to further establish the scattered roots of the modernist American poetic form of kindness that will structure and inform more extensive work on the poetry of the Objectivist poets Zukofsky, Reznikoff and Oppen that takes place in subsequent chapters.

# Chapter 3: Aesthetic agency and the scattered roots of Kindness in Pound and Williams

"Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" is full of allusions and references, making it an example of Pound rendering a substance of poetic form, filling it from the inside out with established images that perhaps have legitimacy due to their age and the poet's personal estimation of their importance. Kenner describes Pound's use of myth as producing the "radiant event" meaning "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" seems at times impossible to read, certainly if one does not happen to read Greek.[150] This issue of "difficulty" in reading is one of the most troublesome and fruitful themes this thesis is concerned with because it is too simplistic to read Pound's obstructionism and his numerous departures from the Roman alphabet as evidence of a lack of Kindness in his work. "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" is undoubtedly extremely difficult to read, so too is Williams's *Spring and All* but the latter offers the English speaking reader the advantage of being written in a language she can understand. Bob Perelman identifies one of the primary differences between Pound and Williams's work in the question of localism, both social and geographical.[151] For Perelman, Pound's "genius" is to do with his projection of his sense of himself as a transcendent thinker entitled to global influence, whereas in "Williams… there is a sense of finiteness and social location that is not there in Pound and Stein".[152] Kindness, however, is not necessarily immediacy or inherent openness. The huge differences between the aesthetics of *Spring and All* and "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" provide a framework within which to

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[150] Kenner, *A Homemade World*, 188.

[151] In "William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All,* and the Anthropological Imaginary" Joshua Schuster develops on James Clifford's ethnographic reading of "To Elsie", in *The Predicament of Culture,* observing that the reading invites a thinking that demonstrates how: "Williams (was able) to argue for the local with an avant-garde poetics that relies on formal techniques of dislocation." James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth—Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (London: Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 116.

[152] Perelman, 3.

discuss the implications of aesthetic agency in terms of the foundation of American modernist poetry and Kindness.

Hugh Kenner describes Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" as the poem that "ended his "aesthetic" period; the "sensitive" man who did not know what was going on he peeled off like a shed skin and called Hugh Selwyn Mauberley".[153] His reading invests the poem with Pound's intention as the poem vocalizes a departure, similar to that which will be examined in relation to Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The'" in Chapter 4. There is an ethics to Pound's shedding of aestheticism in Kenner's interpretation. In turn, this historicising reading from a "paranoid" position reveals how we might critically judge the poem's efficacy but this ambiguity also informs a reading that also serves as an exercise in Kindness. In shedding Aestheticism, Pound is invoking an ethics and inscribing a certain brand of aesthetics, which can be considered from a reparative position, consequently beginning with the considerable problem of the "paranoid" imperative that dominates most readings of this poem. While reading Kindness in exile, it is also worth considering the exile "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" has experienced critically. Perloff, for example, performs a close reading of the poem but only after observing that "*Mauberley* has a problematic place in the Pound canon. Throughout the twenties and early thirties, it was hailed as Pound's one indisputable masterpiece; … The New Critics generally followed this lead…".[154] Even now, the extent of its critical value is now considered to be a kind of pupa of the *Cantos*. Therefore, it is necessary to examine "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" from a reparative position as a gesture towards the beginning of things, to consider it as representing a moment in Pound's career that is as important as any other. The critical exile of the text and the poetic negotiations Pound is making throughout mean the text provides a fertile ground upon which to trace a reparative reading of Kindness. Even from Perloff's interpretation, readers can determine the poem's "behaviour". She finds the poem to be repeatedly compromised by symbolism, despite Pound's impassioned denunciations of this poetic strategy. This position invites an interestingly contrasting position from which to think about Imagism since the poem often fails to be Imagist and, in this sense, has the flawed experimental ambitions that inform the Objectivist project also.

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[153] Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 408.
[154] Perloff, 165.

In *A Homemade World*, Kenner discusses the negotiation of sincerity in the Objectivist "tradition" of the encountered image, rather than:

> To wonder about "sources" is an aspect of wondering about Sincerity; we are inquiring whether the materials have received honest dealing.[155]

What is crucial to Kenner's reading of the Objectivists is normally taken for granted in his treatment of Pound. Despite what many other critics argue, Kenner does not wonder whether Pound's materials in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" "have received honest dealing." The totalising dangers of Pound's conviction in his own certainties are rarely discussed due to the dominant attitude within criticism about "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" that the primary objective should be deciphering all of its references and allusions. Kenner, in addition to others such as K. K. Ruthven and John Espey for example, engages with the text on this cultural, historical level.[156] This is an example of what Perelman calls "the ancillary coherence supplied by the handbooks".[157] "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" provides an interesting problem to negotiate as it allows for reading in exile to be valued from a reparative position. The necessary "handbook" represents a deeply "paranoid" position that fundamentally suggests once we have correctly historicised the text we have successfully deciphered it. However, there are not only ethical flaws and aesthetic oversights within this taxonomy, but also margins of error critics have not considered a possibility. The idea that Pound himself could have been in error by making factual mistakes when he wrote "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" puts an interesting spin on this kind of paranoid criticism. To illustrate the alternative value of the reparative position, I will present an argument from the "paranoid" position that utilizes its historiographical component to demonstrate that while it might be adamant, a paranoid position is necessarily incorrect because as its primary concern is proving that it is correct.

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[155] Kenner, *A Homemade World*, 167.
[156] K. K. Ruthven, *A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personæ (1926)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969); John J. Espey, *Ezra Pound's Mauberley: A Study in Composition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1955).
[157] Perelman, 10.

## **"Luini in porcelain!": A "paranoid" reading.**

Beginning a study of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" by querying the inclusion of Bernadino Luinias the painter the final section of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" refers to may seem hyper-critical.[158] However, reparative reading is specifically engaged in non-punitive ideas of the readerly experience that can accommodate naïveté, therefore, this particular query presents some illuminating facets to the real focus of this discourse, which is reading. It is not intended to dress down the text but rather pose some questions to the text itself, which is so consistently and so clearly redolent with reference that that feature alone renders it, at times, hard to comprehend. The painting K. K. Ruthven names as the pictorial reference of the final section entitled "MEDALLION" is a work by Luini with "A basket-work of braids" that does not appear to exist.[159] That is, the Luini painting that Ruthven cites as the source for the poem is not in fact, by Luini at all, as far as I can determine, the painting is in fact attributed to Francesco Melzi.[160]

George C. Williamson's *Bernardino Luini*, first published in 1899 as part of a series called *Great Masters in Painting and Sculpture*, contains the same image of *La Columbina/Flora* and attributes the painting to Luini. The author, Williamson, is in no doubt whatsoever when attributing the painting to Luini and his description of the image chimes with the role it is believed to play in the "MEDALLION" section:

> A young woman, seated, dressed in a white robe with yellow ornaments, and
> with a blue mantle over her shoulder. She is holding up a spray of columbine,
> at which she is gazing with a pleasant and smiling expression.[161]

The chime I mention is explicit in the use of "yellow" to describe her gown. However, there is a progression in Pound's poem from the staid, muted pleasantness that

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[158] Bernadino Luini (1482-1532) was a northern Italian Renaissance painter in the Leonardo school.
[159] Ruthven, *A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personæ*, 146. John Espey seems happy with the Luini attribution referring to the painting with what seems to be rather amusing ambivalence, "He compares her [the subject of 'MEDALLION'] with a portrait by Bernardino Luini (*La Columbina?)*" (Espey's question mark.) Espey, *Ezra Pound's Mauberley*, 101.
[160] Francessco Melzi (1491-1570) was, like Luini a northern Italian Renaissance painter who also studied under Leonardo.
[161] G. C. Williamson, *Bernardino Luini* (London: George Bell and Sons 1907), 137.

Williamson describes, which transforms the figure into solid, frozen metal, amber and topaz. The third stanza enacts this transformation:

> Honey-red, closing the face-oval,
> A basket work of braids which seem as if they were
> Spun in King Minos' hall
> From metal, or intractable amber;[162]

A further layer of reference, although somewhat obscure, is added as Pound likens the woman to a figure reproduced in an Edwardian compendium of the history of art, Reinach's *Apollo*. Further evidence Ruthven proposes for his suggestion that the painting in question is the Luini/Melzi piece is the constant textual presence of Reinach's *Apollo* in the poem. Ruthven notes Reinach's treatment of Luini in his nineteen-page chapter on Leonardo and Raphael:

> Leonardo himself formed several pupils, or inspired several artists of talent (…), but also a large proportion of clumsy and mediocre imitators. The most popular of these disciples was and is Luini, who may be said to have translated the ideal of Leonardo into simple terms, a process he carried out not altogether without vulgarity, for his elegance is superficial, his drawing uncertain, and his power of invention limited. His most characteristic trait is a certain honeyed softness that delights the multitude.[163]

Ruthven highlights points of correlation between Reinach's and Pound's texts themselves. Note for instance Reinach's use of the word "honeyed" as it corresponds to the "honey-red" of the first line of Pound's third stanza.

Ruthven's first objective, however, is to establish an image that the mention of Luini should provoke, that of a superficial and, therefore, insubstantial second-rate derivative artist. It seems at least slightly unlikely, if not quite a double standard, that Pound would take the survey text Reinach produced and the title claimed to be *An Illustrated Manual of the History of Art Throughout the Ages "with six hundred illustrations"* as its advertisement and use it as the reason to condemn Bernardino Luini. Of course, Pound could be intentionally being ironic here since the staged comparisons that structure "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" would indicate that there is more than just a hint of a sardonic attitude at play throughout. After all, *Apollo*, one

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[162] Pound, *Personæ*, 202.
[163] Saloman Reinach, *Apollo: An Illustrated Manual of the History of Art throughout the Ages, With Six Hundred Illustrations*, trans. by Florence Simmonds (London: William Heinemann, 1907), 189-191.

could argue, seems chiefly guilty of all of the papery and flimsy speed with which ease of access to culture is lamentably critiqued in Section II of the poem:

> Better mendacities
> Than the classics in paraphrase!
>
> The "age demanded" chiefly a mould in plaster,
> Made with no loss of time,
> A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster
> Or the "sculpture" of rhyme.[164]

Pound might not extol Luini with these lines from "MEDALLION" but his inclusion of the painter must be in order to represent more than superficiality in craftsmanship.

Pound's references to Reinach's *Apollo* must represent more than the received idea about Luini's failings as a painter since a compendium like *Apollo* necessarily represents culture as compromised or the compromise of culture to a connoisseur like Pound. This supposition is primarily based on the fact that the Luini painting agreed to be subject of the poem, is not, in fact one of Luini's and the complications of this choice of references has significant implications for the "hero" Mauberley too. Either Pound has made a mistake or Hugh Selwyn Mauberley, the expiring aesthete character, has. Perhaps the attribution query that began this reading of the "MEDALLION" section can inform a reading that cannot assume complete faith in Reinach's position of authority. This mistrust is developed in addition to the set up that precedes "MEDALLION", which sketches Mauberley as a withering and altogether too superficial aesthete, a character not dissimilar to Eliot's Prufrock. It is also perhaps a direct blow to Mauberley's voice itself. John Espey describes "MEDALLION" as "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley's single poem, his one 'curious head,' the portrait of the singing woman whose song has been answered by the active poet of the *Envoi*, stands as his final monument".[165] If this is an acceptable reading, it is possible to imagine that Mauberley's mistake is just that: a deliberate gaffe on Pound's part to further destabilize his character. Undercutting Mauberley himself may not be the only effect because revealing him to have a pedestrian series of references should do more than expose the weakened state of a poet exhausted by the demanding

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[164] Pound, *Personæ*, 186.
[165] Espey, *Ezra Pound's Mauberley*, 101.

and artistically demeaning superficial and grim undercurrents of the post-war London contained in the poem.

The first and only direct mention of Reinach in this poem comes at a point the text seems to be approaching the vaginal, the seawater birth point of the mythic Venus or Aphrodite, "the opening." The following line is clunky and rhythmically anomalous in the stanza. Also the "opening/Pages" seems to physically recall the opening legs of human birth. Consequently, the poem can be seen as occupying the role of that which gives birth, the feminised and passive. Perelman discusses this in terms of Pound's reader, "For Pound, genius is a mode of control over the reader, who is not only "baffled" by the writer's insight but obliterated—to Pound's way of thinking, invaginated, becoming the "passive vulva" to the phallic genius".[166] This supports the idea that texts like *Apollo* give birth to superficial understandings and, therefore, superficial artists. However, the book also contains pictures and references to the great Classical art that Pound publicly admired. The question then becomes: does *Apollo* present classical art itself or does it merely represent "the classics in paraphrase"? Consequently, the query is: does Pound use Reinach to make a point about Mauberley's lack of substance and, if so, how can we account for the mistaken identification of the Luini/Melzi painting? Furthermore, and perhaps most crucially for a "paranoid" position invested for its own survival in interpretative historicizing, is this mistake deliberate and, if not, does it undermine all of Pound's postures and self-promotion as a public intellectual who has all the most significant elements of classic culture at his fingertips.

The error, if that is what it is, demonstrates a failure in Pound's knowledge or at least a superficiality in it. This type of failure and superficiality has been the mobilising source of anger and anxiety throughout "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", so there is a great deal of ambiguity about the role of Reinach yet it is essential to know one's Classics and to be particular about where one knows them from. These shifting standards further disturb the poem and, therefore, the reader, which suggests a flimsyness that is always been at stake throughout "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". The confusion begs the question: does this really matter? It forces the reader back from the text and systematically alienates him/her shifting any focus from a potential emotional core and keeping the engagement with the poem strictly superficial, as demonstrated

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[166] Perelman, 138.

by the frustrated and yet somewhat satisfying realisation detailed above that the painting mentioned is incorrectly attributed. Surely there is more to "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" than this puppetry of reference dangling. The simplistic gorgeousness of the poem "MEDALLION", and the successful synchronicity of image and feeling, creates the hardened coolness of the female figure that ends by transforming and averting its gaze. The poem's highly visual preoccupation seems to dive into Classicism, not as an allegory but as an example of aestheticism, which is the poet Hugh Selwyn Mauberley's main problem. The second stanza plays on the surface in this way as Venus, the goddess of beauty, is evoked:

> The sleek head emerges
> From the gold-yellow frock
> As Anadyomene in the opening
> Pages of Reinach.[167]

Emergence from the sea is blended here with appearance on the page. The "opening" in the third line may refer to the sea itself that brought Venus or Aphrodite forth in the instance called Anadyomene. There is the transcendence of the face into a mythic instance of beauty, making it important to note that the "sleek head emerges" not resembling Venus' head but as Venus herself. There is a celestial suggestion of birth as the head emerges from the gold-yellow opening that, in the case of Venus, is the life-giver. The stanza then ends with a textbook. Ruthven points out the presence of Reinach in the section as Pound, or rather Mauberley, seems to have made strong and repeated reference using quotes.

However, all of this work encourages one to imagine that rather than a portrait of a lack-lustre artist, the transformation that occurs in this section is not merely that of a woman to cold stone or an artist to second-rate references but rather the transposition of art to the catalogue, to plates in books, to the drabness of knowledge and understanding in art. The eyes glaze over, as do the eyes of the readership who might not care to see Luini, or Reinach, and for that matter of Mauberley himself. Kenner identifies the essential quality of the unstill eye in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" when he argues that:

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[167] Pound, *Personæ*, 202.

> Gaudier whose excited eyes Lewis had remembered, peering through the window of that boat train, was to become for Pound the archetypal war casualty; hence the special bitterness of the lines in *Mauberley,*
>> Quick eyes gone under earth's lid
>> For two gross of broken statues…[168]

It is more than possible to imagine that Pound trips up his tragic hero/poet in order to lambast the ease and common availability of the reproduction. But it is equally clear that one has to scratch through the dense poetic surface of reference and allusion to understand this reading and when that is the case, a textbook does seem rather more appealing than just slippery vicious snobbery. Equally, satire, if a total send-up, may not be so vicious. It is possible that in some sense Pound likes or endorses Reinach after all. His *A B C of Reading* (1934) begins with an admission that once again complicates any concrete argument for his attitude toward the text-book medium:

> The present pages should be impersonal enough to serve as a text-book. The author hopes to follow the tradition of Gaston Paris and S. Reinach, that is, to produce a text-book that can also be read 'for pleasure as well as profit' by those no longer in school; by those who have not been to school; or by those who in their college days suffered those things by which most of my generation suffered.[169]

The slightly uncharacteristic academic generosity here may be explained because the main aim of the statement is to decry the state of university education that Pound frequently attacks as a system through which he and his peers suffered. Ennui and a poor work ethic are equally implicated to ridicule those text-books as specifically not art. Remember Kenner's assertion, "Not that classrooms produce poets, or have ever produced them; but classrooms do generate structures in the mind".[170] Once again, this kind of excavation proves ambiguous and fairly fruitless because the urge to establish what Pound thinks too thoroughly eclipses the much more important questions about what he says or, even more importantly, *how* he says it. The idea that

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[168] Kenner, *The Pound Era*, 259.

[169] Pound, *A B C of Reading*, 11.

[170] Kenner, *A Homemade World*, 159. Kenner's "Classroom Accuracies" provides one way to consider the Objectivists as inevitable products of a university system that demonstrates and exclusively preferred certain methodologies. He seems disparaging of the Objectivists, but instead I think he almost commiserates with them on what he sees as their doomed local task to achieve "self-sufficient adequacy […] not the glaze of accomplishment." (Kenner, *A Homemade World*, 166.) Kenner's perspective is not terribly relevant to my perspective in this thesis, however his essay does deliver some real implications about class, race and economic position that will become increasingly valuable throughout.

this mire of text-books and attitudes may be able to inspire the moments of communication that reveal Kindness unfortunately seems unlikely.

The irrelevance of intuition that "MEDALLION" inspires in the reader is strange and disquieting because s/he feels the need not, or indeed the inability, to engage with the poem until s/he *knows* what it is *about*. Once this is done, there is the hollow realisation there was no emotional discovery in the first place, apart from the essential futility of the task. Perhaps this is a result of the "shedding" of the aesthete's skin. The obtuseness comes from Pound's inaccessibility, the idea that the reader must be forced to inhabit the same forum of knowledge and cultural specifics that the poem does in order that s/he might at least understand the superficial meaning of the verse. Indeed, this poses a particular problem for Kindness because the monolithic ideoculture within which the poem demands to be read is at play, to greater or lesser degrees, throughout the whole poem. Ruthven describes "MEDALLION" as:

> The single masterpiece produced by Mauberley, which transforms a living person into the metallic deadness of an *objet d'art* and which synthesizes the limited perfections of Pound's *Lustra* manner.[171]

The miniature hardness of the poem certainly supports this reading. However, as I have argued, it seems unlikely that Pound would equate his poetry from *Lustra* with the textbook availability that shrouds Mauberley's effort. In addition, the signposted references the poem makes flag it as one-dimensional and something much less than vivid. The eye of the poem turns away blindly as the text deliberately refuses to look in or out as the refracted gem-like codas of *Lustra* do. It demonstrates the effects of the distinct removal of physical and visual interaction of the world at large that afflicts Mauberley in the preceding poems. "THE AGE DEMANDED" section further explores Mauberley's separation from the physical world and describes the aesthete's isolation:

> Thus if her colour
> Came against his gaze,
> Tempered as if
> It were through a perfect glaze
>
> He made no immediate application
> Of this to relation of the state

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[171] Ruthven, *A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personæ*, 146.

To the individual, the month was more temperate
　　　Because this beauty had been.[172]

Finally, the deconstruction of the imagination is manifest as the poem itself only engages with other texts that "stroke his retina", to quote Kenner again. The subject for critique here is neither his previous work nor the piteous experiment that Mauberley is capable of but is rather the refusal to engage. From this perspective, the book-learning induces the relinquishment of independent imagination and experience, the "basket-work of braids" encircles the cold, still head and prevents discourse, a helmet that maintains and limits engagement.


## Somatic moments in Williams: Kindness, language, and "behaviour".

"MEDALLION" specifically prevents imagination and this is where it might be good to glance at Williams. The avant-garde progressions Perloff refers to as Williams's "most 'French' composition" will be read here in contrast to Pound's then emerging High Modernism.[173] Williams, however, also realises the contradiction, that is, the deprivation of authentic stimuli and the natural urge to invent, that this modern state incurs, "o meagre times, so fat in everything imaginable".[174] In contrast to the bloodlessness in "MEDALLION", Williams's *Spring and All* is positively reeking of the corporeal, where even acts of imagination are imbued with the writhing physicality that is so specifically absent form Hugh Selwyn Mauberley's ashen existence. Pound's metallic, cold shell meets the trembling, clammy, skin-like edges of Williams's verse, highlighting the moments of balance each text achieves and, in a reparative reading, the communication in poetry that is Kindness. Williams's poem XVI takes on a kind of Dada, Ashcan aesthetic as the collection continues to refer to

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[172] Pound, *Personæ*, 199. Here as an example of aesthetic isolation we can see the inversion of Shakespeare. Whereas in "Sonnet 18", the individual to whom the poem is addressed is "more lovely and more *temperate*[my italics]" than the suggested summer's day, tragically for Mauberley it is the month itself that is improved because of the artists awareness of beauty: the month gets decorated rather than the day falling into, submitting, momentarily, by way of knowledge, to beauty.

[173] "Williams' most "French" composition. It bears the imprint of not only Apollinaire's aesthetic but also of Dada improvisation, of Gertude Stein's poetry and fiction and Rimbaud's *Season in Hell* and *Illuminations*". Perloff, 110.

[174] Williams, *Imaginations*, 90.

mythology and feature a transformation of the eyes that, while still yellowing and dying, produce a very different effect to Pound's:

> O tongue
> licking
> the sore on
> her netherlip
>
> O toppled belly
>
> O passionate cotton
> stuck with
> matted hair
>
> Elysian Slobber
> from her mouth
> upon
> the folded handkerchief
>
> I can't die
>
> --moaned the old
> jaundiced woman
> rolling her
> saffron eyeballs
>
> I can't die
> I can't die[175]

What could be more human and less humane than "Elysian slobber"? With this line, Williams stitches up and unravels the tortured friction between corporeal experience and mythology, the stories we tell to comfort ourselves, thus creating corporeal moment of the aesthetic and the ethic. Is the "slobber" "Elysian" because it comes just before death? If so, Williams draws the horrific disparity between physical death and what people try to believe into relief, thereby introducing a certain cynicism and/or a physician's eye into this text. The poet presents heavenly and mythic saliva coating the slack-mouth of an old woman near death. Perhaps the slobber is the myth, so Elysium itself might be read as the horror of the avoidance tactic in human belief as real death is revealed to animalistic by the slobber. Either way, this feels cynical, cruel, cold, or maybe even sneering in that it offers no comfort to the subject or the viewer/reader. In fact, the vividness of the poem gives it an element of torture, "I

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[175] Williams, *Imaginations*, 129.

can't die/ I can't die". However, this stark poem coloured brightly yellow by illness does enact a kind of embrace. There is a brutal version of truth in the horror of the objective, abandoned death. The connection is not the woman's but the viewer/reader's and there is fear of, even disgust regarding, this gross injustice. A laughable kind of hope and terror in Elysium and the farthest possible hellish point from it is also apparent as the body changes and the eyeballs roll and are "saffron". Yet it is the "lively matter", an assemblage, which the actant of reading revolves around.

The poem does not attempt to reassure but rather to present an instance of physical reality while perfectly underpinning it with the unavoidable spiritual aspect of human life. This is where Kindness enters not because Williams has written a "universal truth" or something so dark that the reader feels compelled to suspect its verity but instead because he has shown the reader something. With no metaphor or similes, his method of demonstration does not confound or even necessarily illuminate but rather permits engagement on a level that is corporeal and mythic. While Kindness is not specifically bodily, it may well be the case that a certain physicality in expression permits a reparative reading in that physicality of form somehow attaches "sincerity" to the object of the poem. Another example of this can be seen in Reznikoff's "The ceaseless weaving of the uneven water".[176] Significantly, the poem hinges on Elysium since there are eight lines on either side of "Elysian slobber". Indeed, the poem before "Elysian slobber" could perhaps be a sordid poem about sex, with a tongue licking, a belly, sweat, and passionate cotton. These erotic tropes are marred by the "sore" and the "stuckness", making these discomforts and vulgarities contribute to the torrid nature of the lines. But if one tries to find a narrative for the first eight lines the physicality and repeated "O"s therein lend themselves to this reading, which of course heightens the drama of the drop into "Elysian slobber". The scene unfolds itself quickly in this phrase and there is a sinking sense of horror that would not be amiss in Poe. The slip perhaps being so gruesome and corporeal precisely because the "Elysian slobber" might also present the fluids produced in the sexuality of the first eight lines. This might be a pun, but I would argue that it is an example of Williams demonstrating a poetic contingency, a balance that exists within the poem or the reading of the poem itself. This poem might

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[176] Reznikoff, *The Poems*, 25.

then read as an assemblage of "actants" because its behaviour is striking and engaging, even grotesque, when we read it as Kind.

When the old woman moans "I can't die", it is interesting to note the use of the word "can't" rather than "cannot". The abbreviation affects an exhalation with the missing syllable replaced at the end of the line with a gulp. Also, the abbreviation has the effect of reducing the moment of agony to a speedier statement, which purposefully lacks the grandiose "cannot". Language itself here works to weaken the speaker and simultaneously displays her weakness; one could argue that there is no determination in an apostrophe. This is why we might read the phrase as a plea or a cry of hopelessness. Accordingly, the reader sympathises with her moan for numerous reasons since his/her suffering of the grotesque experience makes him/her long to expedite the inevitable. This urge is primary over the imagined subject's plight and is one form the reparative position might be seen to assume since the underlying empathy the reader feels is not an engagement with the subject herself but rather an engagement with the poem and, consequently, with him/herself as the reader. The reader who is thoroughly engaged responds emotionally as s/he is wont to do. The contrast between the clipped and incisive lines of the poem and the messy "matted" subject forces the reader to get in between the thing itself and how s/he is reading. The gap in the poem forces the gap in the reader and there is an experimental element that uses very controlled conditions to explore the reactivity of the reader. Once again, the understanding is stretched and kneaded so the clot of verbiage is thinned. In this sense, I would argue that the reader is reading the poem's behaviour since the reader's own response gives the poem itself an independent agency. This section should demonstrate that Kindness in poetics never needs to be pleasant but rather just simply reparative.

Naturally, the humanity of a poem is an elusive component to define let alone locate, particularly in poems that, as is generally considered to be the case amongst high modernist work, seem to be so thoroughly concerned with the medium of poetry itself. However, this self-reflexive distinction is precisely the key to sourcing the Kindness of poetry that depends upon a "warts and all" human presence. In the sense that a human experience is not strictly *about* one thing or another, poetry that can divorce itself from "meaning" and be about experience permits the accidental moment of communication in the vibrant, reparative sense that largely defines Kindness. The problem, consequently, is finding a poem that is not concerned with what it is

"about". This can only ever be the reader's job, which is inevitably compelled or facilitated by the poem and its invitation to invest and know, thus revealing another cornerstone of Kindness as it manifests to horror or anxiety that is momentary. Again, this endeavour is the portion of Kindness itself, allowing us to look at poems in the same way Bennett looks at the storm drain. Admittedly, this ideal of prone readership may not necessarily always alight on such Kindness, indeed it rarely does, but it remains important to carouse through these poems in order to examine them from, and demonstrate, the *beside* position of Kindness. For this reason, it is essential to compare two such apparently wildly different poems in an attempt to garner some understanding of the posture of a moment in a poem and understand its behaviour in terms of the reparative position. This presents problems for reading itself that I aim to tackle through reading Williams and Pound.

## "The authority of experience": Authenticity and the "ideoculture" in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley".

To return to "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", a long poem that can be effectively read as a survey of Pound's experiences in London and the people he encountered, the derision and difficulties he experienced as an aspiring autocrat of poetry during the cloying transition from a moralistic Victorian legacy to the quick, cheaply done Edwardian/Georgian era in the context of the First World War are sketched out. Amongst the deceptive and shifting hall of mirrors that Pound writes the Edwardian London milieu into are two sections that do not hitch themselves to esoteric or gossipy caravans of culture. Sections IV and V follow a fairly standard narrative strategy, with the former being specifically narrative in describing the carnage and huge loss of life that occurred in the horrific trenches of WW1, while the latter expresses the regret and fury that this immense tragedy caused. With these sections, Pound strikes as close to the bone as he does at any other part of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" because they are not adorned by or concerned with the fat of culture but are concerned with the lacerated flesh of society and humanity. The WW1 sections stick out like sore-thumbs from the tumbling profusions of false cultural delicacies that make up the rest of the first sections. The war features in the poem as it does in

reality by searing through the haze of dangerous cheapness and superficial society in Edwardian London, almost declaring war *on* the poem. The presence of Sections IV and V presents a firmer aspect of the violence that is subverted and played with in the general outrage of the other sections. This violence is evident in the poeticism of the sections themselves, most notably in section IV, as there seems to be a direct hacking at culture itself and, in turn, upon language that does not feature so strikingly in the other sections.

The hacking is evident in the rhythm and the uncomplicated syntax that Pound employs as he describes the First World War. Indeed "culture" itself takes a hacking in the particularly poignant lines 71-73 of Section IV:

> Died some, pro patria,
>        non "dulce" non "et decor"…
> walking eye-deep in hell[177]

This is a particularly tangible moment in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" as a whole and it is important to note that to a modern reader thinking about the First World War, the phrase "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" tends to immediately recall Wilfred Owen's seminal, indeed perhaps genre defining, poem from 1917. The poet's bitterly painful yet ironic twist of these words is familiar to us, exposing the very raw and bloody, unjust and brutal, hypocrisy of the battle cry. The expression has come to mean suffering and instantly evokes personal and the mass agony of loss and death. Owen's poem "Dulce Et Decorum Est" was first published in 1920, two years after the poet had died in November 1918 a week before the end of the war. "Hugh Sewlyn Mauberley" was also published in 1920. Rather unsurprisingly, Pound's use of the famous Latin from Horace has not been so seared onto the consciousness of the (British) reading public. However, I would suggest that this would not have surprised Pound much either despite the fact that section V of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" is engaged in addressing the horror and guilt that Owen's poem so perfectly and terribly provokes. In his introduction to the *Poems by Wilfred Owen* (1920), Siegfried Sassoon describes Owen's appropriation of the Horace and helps explain the terrible resonance that Pound lacks. According to Sassoon, Owen's is "backed by the

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[177] Pound, *Personæ,* 188.

authority of experience as an infantry soldier".[178] In section V, Pound is precisely tackling the fact that he is not "backed by the authority of experience"; he is more than comfortable transporting himself through time and space to Imperial China or ancient Lesbos but the trenches of the Somme or Passchendaele are not on his map. However, authority of voice is not something Pound the poet lacks and his problematic, yet justified, self-conception as a poetic innovator is kindled in variously clear ways in section IV.

In a draft foreword that was discovered after the poet's death, Owen wrote that:

> Above all, this book is not concerned with Poetry.
> The subject of it is War, and the pity of War.
> The Poetry is in the pity.[179]

This formulation speaks to Section IV but it is in reverse because for Pound the pity is very much in the poetry. This is evident not only as discussed because Pound lacked the "authority of experience" fighting in war would immediately provide but also in his treatment of the passage from Horace. Owen, by directly addressing a "you", manages to address the reader him/herself while also engaging the reader in the act of addressing. That is, the "you" at once speaks directly to the reader while also offering the reader in his/her act of reading an opportunity to also address a "you". The reader, therefore, is the intended recipient of the poem and also, by subtle distinction, joins the voice of the poem too. By addressing the poem outward towards "you" there is an overt sense of culpability at play, that is, the "you" implies or demands accountability for ignorance from those who view war as in any way positive. This demand and level of reasoning has a strangely balanced, stabilising effect. Ultimately, as the poem informs the reader of the horrors it distinguishes and also distinguishes the reader from those who are culpably ignorant, it brings about a sort of pact of security, horror and knowledge, presenting the common enemy to be ignorance. The reader is made complicit with the voice of the poem and s/he addresses him/herself as a witness to the horror and the shame so s/he can feel profoundly aligned with the suffering of the poem. Owen's poem concludes:

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[178] Siegfried Sassoon, "Introduction" in, Wilfred Owen, *Poems by Wilfred Owen,* intro. by Siegfried Sassoon (London: Chatto & Windus, 1921), v.
[179] Owen, *Poems*, ix.

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
*Pro patria mori.*[180]

Where Owen's poem addresses itself outwards in an externalisation validated by the "authority of experience", Pound's verse specifically internalises and acts as poetry working on poetry to exemplify pity. The formal use of quotation marks and the rhythmic and syntactical disruption of the poem itself render Pound's approach as one of internalisation. The polemic is in the poetry itself and is one of absence and violent tragedy. Pound offers a syntactical refutation of loss and splits propaganda open with incongruous cries of "non". This in turn demonstrates the physicality of the impact of WW1 on poetry itself so that a poem about loss becomes a poem about poetry after war. The poet who was absent can only fill his absence and the absence of war with poetry. In doing so, Pound hacks at poetry itself. It is appropriate then that both Owen and Pound have rounded back on Horace.

Horace's Latin is a perfectly balanced sequence of seven, then six, syllables. They represent a march by being loosely iambic and present a verbal crescendo as the "D" sounds are followed by "P" sounds, march to the front of the mouth to end on the lips with "*Mori*". Pound's corruption of this march is literally as well as rhythmically significant. The inserted "non"s simultaneously refute the expression as well as halting the march so its order is lost and the momentum of the phrase is dragged out; it no longer stirs but stops. The quotation marks heighten this effect as they force the "non"s to become alien in the text itself because they are clearly and deliberately separate and different; they insert themselves from somewhere else and are, therefore, more strikingly imposed on the original syntax. The "non"s puncture the rhythm-like rifle shots as the poetry acts destructively and corruptively upon the expression, destructive and corruptive, as the war did on so many others; it is a poetic protest enacted in, even upon, a poem. This represents the perfect synthesis of object, syntax, rhythm and objective in a poetical exercise of precise presentation and sincerity. A thoroughly embedded and textured passage appears in verse as the Latin is scarred by verbal objections to complicate the dominant vista of patriotism, trenches and soldiers.

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[180] Owen, *Poems*, 15.

The insistent repetitions of the first ten lines of section V create a sprawling force which falls short at the murky inception of the reversal of word order and the corruption of the potent Latin, "Died some, pro patria". This phrase has immediate effect and the musicality of Pound's composition is thoroughly dependable in that it follows a predictable trajectory of feeling that succinctly echoes the swift succession of emotion the war evinced. The dependability results from the reassuring cohesion of rhythm and feeling so there are no shocks in the musicality and the catalytic repetition of the beginning meets its end in the grim and confused fracture of the Latin march. This is followed by a much more scattered rhythm with syntactically similar diphthongs; "lies", "lie", "deceit" and "liars" pepper the verse. The repetitions feel more like a pained stammer, as in "came home, home to a lie," and "Young blood and high blood". The confusion is deliberate, as Pound achieves the shattered, fragmented, and shocked feeling of the possibility of war but the impossibility of recovery. The poem is effective and its synthesis symphonic because it is moving and clear; it is perhaps the section most easy to navigate in the entirety of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". Certainly, it provides the most apparent frame for reading in the work as a whole because its unambiguous moment is almost reassuring in its tragic horror means the reader can be certain at least of the emotional direction his/her response should refer to. This sign-posted agenda of feeling is problematic for Kindness, however, because it precludes the necessarily explorative, communicative and engaged aspects of reading that are essential to Kindness in poetry itself.

This preclusion may be explained by the subject matter, which is naturally upsetting and powerful. With no intention of diminishing the importance of the subject, I would suggest that the immediacy of it in fact obscures the quality of Kindness and prevents the implementation of the "grammar of reading" that Kindness describes. This raises the very important and curious question about Kindness: why does something as powerful as the various aspects of loss sustained in war resist my idea of poetic Kindness? Surely it would seem that universality of sympathy is the apparent key to Kindness. However, to begin to answer the question we must first address how it is that this huge and apparently accessible subject can so exclude a reader's engagement with the text. The idea is that such a large index of commonly understood feeling must in some way preclude Kindness as it affects poetry with an already known trauma that conversely diminishes the language of a poem itself. One reason for this can be explained by Attridge's notion of "singularity", the appearance

of the "other" amongst the ordinary. The war is always "other", especially to those who, like Pound, do not possess the "authenticity of experience". Similarly, the ordinary reader is already without his/her ideoculture, and the attendant aesthetic and ethical considerations, as the readerly act of imagination is stymied by the inauthenticity of that very imagination. The reparative point derives from the rage and sorrow that the behaviour of the poem demonstrates, its own internalised inefficacy. It is a poem that, unlike a great deal of Pound's other work, is not anchored in certainty but seems to reveal the aesthetic floundering in the ethical. Despite its accessibility, it is difficult to read this section as Kind.

The WW1 sections of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" provide the reader with the most readily apparent frame for reading within the text, which represents a certain readerly security and allows him/her reader to stop or finish his/her attempt at understanding its meaning. Kindness, as a reparative "grammar of reading", struggles to be productive in such an instance when it must rely on the paradigm-based frames conducting or imposing meaning onto subjects or objects. That is, the frame shapes understanding or meaning and, consequently, shapes the poem as it strives for understanding and shared knowledge. The reader has been given the category within which to judge the poem's efficacy and these established frames inhibit poetry in this sense because they prevent any reading of the poem from being an independent unit. They are so culturally subject to a "hermeneutics of suspicion" that the poem's potential to be singular is compromised by its inherent vitality, meaning the poem as assemblage/object cannot appear as a surprise when it is already the product of an "other" assemblage, such as what WW1 represents for the majority of readers here.[181] This may be the case with the sections I have just discussed because through Pound's urge to be singular what is in fact conveyed is the overwhelming vibrancy of war in the vibrant materialist sense. The nature of the relationship between frames and Kindness will be continually examined throughout the thesis, in particular in Chapter 5 in relation to the "everyday" or "pedestrian" content of the Objectivists Reznikoff and Oppen. It is important to state here, however, that whilst I aim to point to the importance of the specifically poetic frame in a "grammar of reading", Kindness, in this reading is relevant to the current texts and is certainly something that will develop

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[181] Of course this is a selective sample. I hope it is clear that I do not at all wish to preclude any readers from my writing. I use this example of early twentieth century military combat to demonstrate the effects of reading beyond one's capacity to know. In the conclusion, I discuss Reznikoff's work *Holocaust* to this end more thoroughly.

and alter thematically as readings of the Objectivist movement become the focus of the thesis.

These frames for reading ultimately serve to distance the reader because they reinforce the impossibility of knowing the moment and thereby miss the mark of Kindness, at least for the average reader who had or had not seen trench warfare. To repeat the "vibrancy" of the "subject" seems to inhibit "singularity", especially in the war sections. The poem itself does not function as documentary, indeed it precisely cannot in the way that Owen's does. However, one might read Pound's own distance into the readerly experience. While Pound's lack of primary experience is crucial to him as the poet writing this poem, I do not want to suggest that lack of primary experience is crucial to the reader. This lack of a specific experience is common in most readers and in the case of these war poems, the reader understands it is his/her great fortune not to know these horrors. Significantly, Pound in this section seems to understand this inability and writes from a similar position of explicit incomprehension and horror. One problem with reading "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" in terms of Kindness reveals a pertinent problem in the "grammar of reading" that sketches Kindness in modernist poetry itself. This problem arises when we try to reconcile Kindness with narrative, with storytelling. If we could find Kindness in storytelling then all we would ever require would be testimonies or fables. That is, the ethical would be the dominant force in Kindness over the aesthetic as it is in fables. It is important to assert that the aesthetic and the ethic are not only equal considerations in Kindness but the "grammar" represents a reading that engages the subtle and infinite interplays between the two. Kindness, in this sense, is *only* to be found almost exclusively in poetry. Narratives feed and bleed into too much shared knowledge and understanding so that while they may be moving, they do not always shimmer with the vitality of the drain or so swiftly invite the "other" into the frame.

It is necessary to draw a distinction here that is essential to the theory of Kindness. The philosophical understanding of poems as constructs of form, rhythm and syntax can always be read to be *about* something, which has been the primary subject of a great deal of critical discussion in structural, post-structural, ethical, and new-historical critical analyses. Levinas, for example, would argue that the ethics of the poem are *a priori* to its writing and to its reading, meaning the text, therefore,

always acts as trace.[182] The implications of this for Kindness are that, while a poem contains a particular meaning, its form, rhythm and syntax present content that is vital to an understanding of Kindness and the ethical efficacy of reparative reading in exile. In a reading that considers "behaviour", instead of proposing content as the constitutive quality of its form; rhythm and syntax feature as a *presence* within themselves. This is a Levinasian concept of the trace that can also be discerned in Bennett's "vibrant materiality." The notion of behaviour emerges in part through Bennett's notion of the "actant" as a mobilizing notion of the reading itself, thus inviting a reparative reading that can accommodate naïveté as a valuable ethical position of exile. Therefore, rather than meaning structuring our reading of a poem, in Kindness, the reparative position structures our reading of the poem in Kindness and consequently forms a notion of behaviour that is available to the reader through the text itself. That is, Kindness in poetry is becoming clearly defined primarily as moments of abstract communication specific to an ideoculture and is defined by the reading of the poem itself regardless of the subject. This is evinced by the earlier discussion on the significance and relevance of the subject of the WWI sections.

It is useful now to briefly refer again to Williams's poem beginning "O tongue/ licking/ the sore on/ her netherlip". The previous reading considered the central line "Elysian Slobber" as the pivotal and most exacting point of the poem, focusing attention on the brutal cleavage of these two words as representing, respectively, the human urge to mythologise the afterlife and the obscenity of corporeal suffering or death. The reading, therefore, established that this affected a moment of terror and clarity that lead the reader to inhabit both the awful horror of death and equally the tempting falsehood of comforting myths. Spanning the gap in the poem as the reader must provides a moment that is highly revealing and quite piercing. The purpose of readdressing this reading here is to examine how "Elysium" works in the poem as representing a narrative. Whether the narrative is true or not, whether it is fact or fiction or is presented in the first person, second or third person is immaterial. What matters is that narratives serve as vital modes of communication that allow people to share information and knowledge. They are more artful than mere information precisely because they have a purpose. A story has a teller so there is an

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[182] Applying Levinas' phenomenological ethics to the reading of poetry would posit the poem as containing a trace of that which is other, both in terms of its textual nature and the ontological subject it purports to represent or give voice to. The poem engages with ethics when this trace is not intentionally precluded but actively engaged with or, in terms more suited to my thesis, encountered by the poet.

inherent reason for it being told, i.e. for it to convince or persuade, amuse, shock, move or entertain, but it is always informed by the implicit desire to share. With this understanding at the base of our experience of narratives, the reader is automatically on his/her back foot; they are passive in the exchange and assured they will receive information because they are engaging in something *for* them.

This passivity is crucial to any thinking about Kindness because Kindness is totally predicated on an unencumbered readerly engagement with the poem as object. That is not to say that narratives don't of course provide a huge wealth of communicable knowledge and engagement even in a poetic sense. But Kindness is not the result of typical "poetic" achievements such as textures, layers or meaning. It is the result of a "grammar of reading" that engages with words glancing off each other and, in that moment, understanding glancing off other understandings. A "grammar" of Kindness does not privilege a crescendo of heightened poetical dramatics rather it specifically highlights the continuity of experience. The swiftness of a Kind moment in reparative reading precisely reinforces the fleeting nature of the moment of shared knowledge. Furthermore, it seeks to reconcile the epistemological nature of language with the non-verbal nature of human experience by combining the two. It is not a temporal moment of bright clarity or purity of vision but is instead a pervasive moment of shared consciousness that does not require intense exposure, only the accident of humanity being truly manifest in the complex object assemblage of poetry and reading poetry. It not only resists conclusion but is in fact successful only if it momentarily ends conclusion by breaking the boundaries of personal knowledge and understanding that represent the limit of communication. In this sense, it has a vital understanding similar to Pound's idea of something that "everybody KNOWS". Consequently, there will be present in Kindness an essential quality of timelessness that engenders a form of consciousness as the platform for understanding the apprehension of the singular. "Elysium", therefore, evokes the narrative and "Slobber" to precisely represent the physical so Kindness can inhabit the broad and yet terribly narrow space between these two dominant ways, the ethic and the aesthetic. Moreover, as mentioned, there is a certain type of verbal poetic epistemology at play in the apostrophe that shortens the dying woman's "can't." The subtlety of this apostrophe informs the reader that "cannot" does not mean "can't" and vice versa as an example of the spanning of "meaning" and "understanding". We, as

readers and as people, understand our experiences and everything they entail, everything we *know.*

## The "Beside" position: Certainty, meaning, and "behaviour"

There is a difference between story-telling and telling, which is an evident distinction in modernist poetry and is explored with particular vitality in the Imagist project. Presenting the moment and expressing an instant are primary interests in the modernist poetic agenda and the Imagist poem theoretically serves as a demonstration, such is the certitude that provokes it. The space for the poem is a platform for an ideological declaration, a facet that persuades the reader that the absence of a temporally developed narrative amends their readerly experience and exploits a moment, an image that grants them greater or at least a more specific insight than just narrative. This expectation, however, is problematic because words themselves inevitably imply a narrative for the poet and for the reader. The intention motivating a reparative reading that promotes Kindness is to appreciate how a poem aligns the words in such a way as to make the narratives of the reader's words coincide with that of the poet's. Accordingly, in a reparative reading that privileges the individual in the act of reading itself, meaning becomes a fraught or compromised term, it becomes a case of efficacy for the reader if we chose to use meaning as the preferred qualitative method for reading a poem. "Behaviour" as a method, on the other hand, privileges the vibrancy of the "actant" in the assemblage or the object poem, while reading the behaviour of the poem allows the reader to engage with the poem form *Beside* it.

An example of the problematic, "paranoid", meaning-focused reading in contrast to a "behavioural" reading is provided by Williams's seminal poem from *Spring and All*:

XXII

so much depends
upon

a red wheel

barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens[183]

The poem's potency is located in its apparent unobtrusiveness. The suggestion of a kitchen window frames the text, as the "rain water" places the view-point indoors and the visible yard in the poem implies a kitchen. The observational quality of the poem is almost disconcerting as it engages stillness and contemplation but it does not belong to the reader and the dispassionate "behaviour" of the observation has a clinical tone that seems to not want to be discovered, thus making the poem disconcerting. The poem provides a strange combination of a gingham palette and the abstracted notion of dependence of philosophical weight and significance, yet the agrarian setting presents a bucolic, even potentially political, poetic that is spellbinding. The very textures of the poem are striking, with the shining wheel barrow frozen/glazed with water. The droplets have the effect of rendering the wheelbarrow more solid and static than it necessarily is, which is contrasted with feathers and the motion of the chickens as they duck and pick around a yard. The order of presentation amplifies the redness of the wheelbarrow so it seems to be the "figure" and the "ground" of the poem, while the chickens so unstill next to it fleck the redness. The physical balance of the wheelbarrow side by side with the chickens plays out the most essential balance of the poem, which is located the first two lines. While it is not unreasonable to read "so much depends" as referring to the communist, or at least populist, political agenda implicit in the redness of the "red wheel/ barrow" this reading seems to stultify the vibrancy of communication in the text itself. This interpretation and the politicised reading represent narratives because they involve deductions and imaginary attachments.   A reading that refers to Kindness, instead, would argue that the weighty "so much" is balanced against poetry itself. Indeed "so much" and "depends" are fairly explicit syntactical "actants". *Spring and All* is profoundly concerned with colour, specifically red, and the edges of presentation as representing limits of imagination. So the image of the wheelbarrow itself can be read or "red" to bear the weight of American poetry and a possible ethics of aesthetics.

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[183] Williams, *Imaginations*, 138.

The tempting attribution of external significance, as seen in identifying the political agenda as an important poetic principle, does not diminish either reading even though it precludes Kindness. However, the anxiety in the poem can be perceived as the tensions of the frame and the vibrancy of the matter hum at an ethical pitch in a taught aesthetic. The poem "behaves" anxiously and this anxiety proves to be the starting point for Kindness itself. It is therefore possible to argue that this anxiety about communication and the ensuing struggle with language in the form of a poem in fact permits access to a "behavioural" element of experience because the anxious struggle must emerge in the exact words of the poem itself, they are the "actants" through which "behaviour", that assemblage is produced[184]. The anxiety can be focused to enforce disparity and the problem that language poses for communication. It follows that this anxiety must necessarily drive the distance between language and understanding to a point at which they may fully, if only momentarily, meet. For this to be achieved, the notion of meaning in a poem must be re-understood or at least temporarily overlooked because a paranoid narrative construction of meaning only really serves as an obstruction to Kindness in poetry. When isolated from "meaning", this poem almost cannot fail under a reparative "grammar of reading" to provoke a puzzling Kindness.

The un-anchored opening line is specifically vulnerable. This line is almost fragmentary in its presentation of a clause that is not initially tethered to any context. To repeat it presents an easily identifiable "actant" since the clause plays out within the poem as a struggle for relevance itself, such that the question is about the

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[184] Jane Bennett develops her notion of "assemblage" from the work of Deleuze and Guattari. She does this as she theorises "vibrant matter" as an eco-political method of thinking about and encountering the planet. As I have discussed she begins her description of the apprehension of "vibrant matter" with an anecdote about coming across a storm drain in Baltimore. In order to theorise her discovery she has recourse to Deleuze and Guattari's notion of "assemblage". In her description of "assmbleges" that follows I find a great deal of resonances with the ideological and imaginative perspectives that Kindness as a "grammar of reading" proposes. That is, in this sense, Kindness reads poems as assemblages, and if they correspond to Kindness, the poem can be read as possessing "vibrant singularity". The emotionality of Bennett's perspective and syntax has also been inspiring to my notion of Kindness. Bennett writes:

> "Assemblages are ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts. Assemblages are living, throbbing confederations that are able to function despite the persistent presence of energies that confound them from within. They have uneven topographies, because some points at which the various affects and bodies cross paths are more heavily trafficked than others, and so power is not distributed equally across its surface. Assemblages are not governed by any central head: no one materiality or type of material has sufficient competence to determine consistently the trajectory or impact of the group. The effects generated by an assemblage are, rather emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen […] is distinct from the sum of the vital force of each materiality considered alone." Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 23-24.

subjectivity of reading. The line expresses an open anxiety that is both inviting and oppressive because the reader simultaneously inhabits and understands this moment. Experience and expectation combine to instigate a weighty moment of panic even though this panic is not related to politics, farmyards, chickens or wheelbarrows. The words themselves present a rhythmic descent that is pendulous. The next line "upon" teases this anxiety further since it mirrors the troubling balance of dependence, with "up" "on" implying an unquantifiable pressure. Panic is valid and almost enhanced when it eclipses its cause, making it acute. In the poem, the panic seems to ease as the scene fills out. However, in the reading this sense of panic necessarily lingers, becoming a tension that this presents a moment of Kindness. Even if we permit a reading that relies or "depends-upon" meaning, the clarifying impact of the first line remains. The "meaning of the poem" can, therefore, be utterly subjective because the reader has been brought to the point of the poem, the Kind point that invites a unifying moment when a reparative reading is possible. The first line is simultaneously sharp and porous; it draws out a wince that comes from the improbability of comprehension and the enormity of understanding, thus causing anxiety about the just read "red wheelbarrow". This wince is a tangible instance of Kindness in modernist American poetry, it is a crucial point for finding Kindness and identifying the platforms upon which it takes shape and the dependencies upon which it relies.

## "Behaviour" and behaviour in Williams

Of course Kindness cannot and does not exclusively depend on moments that begin with something akin to empathy or an explicit "actant" such as "so much depends upon". The resonance is at once emphatic and subtle, and the contrast of apparent meaning draws out the reader's experience to engage a vibrant reparative reading. That is, the "behaviour" of the language in the poem will inform the "behaviour" of its reading or its reader's understanding, which echoes Olson's idea of "the *kinetics* of the thing. A poem is energy transferred".[185] For example:

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[185] Olson, 3.

X

The universality of things
draws me toward the candy
with melon flowers that open

about the edge of refuse
proclaiming without accent
the quality of the farmer's

shoulders and his daughter's
accidental skin, so sweet
with clover and the small

yellow cinquefoil in the
parched places.[186]

The crucial partnering of words in this poem occurs in the eighth line, as the surprising adjective "accidental" for "skin" catapults the poem into the realms of Kindness. The use of the word is so brilliantly timed that it refracts and bounces off itself and the poem around it, with "accidental" ringing with the "accent". It implies a slip in the poem or a slip of clothing, implying the accidental quality of the nature of human beauty. The poem achieves its most synchronistic moment when the placing, rhythm and assonance of the words "farmer's/shoulder's and his daughter's/accidental skin" muddle together in a heady confusion, with the shoulders seeming to belong to the daughter. The possessive apostrophe creates a web of lineage between bodies, paternal control, masculine work and feminine allure. It reinforces the fleeting insubstantiality of the physical, the slip of observing the skin of another or the slip of a garment possibly from a shoulder, which is still resonating from the farmer's shoulder. There is a sense of guilty delight in accidental skin, a strange and slightly erotic moment of observing the unobserved, a worrying sweetness which of course is emphasised in "so sweet", so that this pair of words thoroughly articulates a glance. The bitterness of the "s" and the small "o" sound puckering the mouth, one can taste the words. It is an instance of communication and knowing that is broadened specifically by its resistance to meaning.

The resistance to meaning may be found in the conflation of the observer and the observed, indicating the bizarre complicity that the phrase creates in a moment that is unassuming. A faultless moment, an intangible viewer with no agenda and the

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[186] Williams, *Imaginations*, 117-118.

skin of a shoulder with no agenda make this moment ripe with beauty and deception. This functions similarly to the quality of dispassionate observation discussed in the commentary on the "Red Wheelbarrow" poem. This is the result of the authentic smudge that Williams writes with "accidental skin", the phrase evincing an explicit blur. This moment is significantly couched in a fascinating study of edges and contrasts but the "accidental skin" pierces the florid and cloyed, almost olfactorily present contrast between "refuse" and "melon". Another crucial partnering is evident here with the fleeting and delicious terminal longevity of fruit representing the moment of opportunity for consumption. A poetic *momento mori*, a Dutch still life like the skin of the farmer's daughter is fleeting too. This is precisely the conflicted experience that suggests Kindness in Williams's work (The "cinquefoil" is a flower that is often referred to as "barren strawberry" it's Latin name is Potentilla: which is an expression power-"potent"- affixed with the diminutive-"illa". This reading represents a paranoid moment.) Notions of the flavour of taste and deliciousness strain against the inevitability of rot and decay, an example of the competing urges to preserve, devour, prevent, take and save. A puritanical tradition reliant on remembering the fleeting pleasures of this mortal coil warns against placing any stock in them while delighting in representing them visually. These contradictions lie at the heart of the simple complexity of Williams's cruel form of Kindness. That is, while Kindness as evinced as a "grammar of reading" is necessarily present in the aesthetic and ethical oscillations of the poem itself, Williams's poems can demonstrate a form of certainty akin to Pound's. The distinction I make here is that Williams's poems have a swift and incisive syntactical ethics that as I will demonstrate can be read, through a reading of Kindness that observes behaviour, as emotionally cruel while poetically Kind. The American puritanical tradition at play in Williams's work represents a fascinating avenue for a discussion of Kindness, especially in a context that considers Pound who, by the Thirties was deeply invested in his commitment to Fascism.[187] In contrast to Pound's anti-Semitism is indeed, the work of the Jewish

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[187] Burton Hatlen makes a curious argument for reading Pound's *Cantos* as "the record of Pound's struggle" with the divided conflict that Hatlen argues produced Pound's fascism. He figures Pound as an individual who through a series of conflicting modern ideals in response to Capitalism and a personal penchant for dogmatic reasoning *becomes* a fascist rather than deciding to be a common-all-garden fascist. Hatlen sets up the conflicting personas that comprise Pound the fascist in two columns: "On the right side of [his] chart, a frightened authoritarian steps out, terrified at the threat which a rising tide of mass democracy poses to the cultural treasures of human kind, determined to preserve (through violence if necessary …) the power and the property of a ruling elite, and no less determined to expugn [sic.] from the nation the alien, subversive influence of Jews. Yet if we read down the left

writers of Objectivism who address their Jewish heritage with varying levels of intensity and with naturally varying results. However, while this consideration will not be ignored entirely, it cannot be the primary concern of a work based on reparative readings. Nevertheless, the notion of exile that Kindness is developed upon is central to the poems being analysed here. For this reason, the cultural heritage and the position the poems occupy is, as discussed in the introduction, significant to the reparative method adopted in this argument.

Morality is often an arbitrary and compromised condition with which to judge anything and is generally considered superfluous to literary criticism because it can present all manner of warped mirrors with which to consider a text, none of which are ethical, aesthetic or reparative. However, the "cruelty" mentioned in the last paragraph requires departing briefly from exclusively reading *Spring and All*. "This is just to say" is the Williams poem that probably equals "A red wheel/barrow" in fame. It is a relevant digression as the poem, perhaps most explicitly of all of Williams's poetry, enacts the duplicity that, when present in a poem, is *working* on the reader, drawing him or her into a very human ambiguous moment. Kenneth Koch makes a wonderful demonstration of the ubiquitous, seething and sinister gentility that pervades this poem in "Variations on a Theme by William Carlos Williams", exposing the dramatic scale of the "narrative" by adjusting the slippery coolness or entitled cruelty the poem seems to have by virtue of it being a poem:


1

I chopped down the house that you had been saving to live in next
        summer.
I am sorry, but it was morning, and I had nothing to do
and its wooden beams were so inviting.

2

We laughed at the hollyhocks together
and then I sprayed them with lye.
Forgive me. I simply do not know what I am doing.

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side of [his] chart, a very different political persona emerges: a "Quaker Pound," committed to the creation of a peaceful and just community, grounded in love and the harmonies of nature." Burton Hatlen, "Ezra Pound and Fascism" from *Ezra Pound and History*, ed. by Marianne Korn (Orono, Me: The National Poetry Foundation, 1985), 163.
Hatlen perceives vulnerability in Pound too, but of course, to a different end to the one that I pursue when I examine Pound's pre-fascist poem of exile "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley".

3

I gave away the money that you had been saving to live on for the next
       ten years.
The man who asked for it was shabby
and the firm March wind on the porch was so juicy and cold.

4

Last evening we went dancing and I broke your leg.
Forgive me. I was clumsy, and
I wanted you here in the wards where I am the doctor![188]

Williams's original is a feat of framing and addressing that combines the unsettlingly quiet domesticity of "red wheel/barrow" with the enticing "you" discussed earlier in relation to Owen. The crystalline and rich poem seems to replicate the "icebox" it refers to, as the single syllable words greatly outnumber the two or three syllable words. Consequently, the rhythm of "This is just to say" is staccato and clipped, yet it is submerged in the utterly approachable tone of the poem:

I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox

and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast

Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold[189]

As for "meaning", the poem produces an odd, reflexive narrative in its action as a confession. The line "so sweet" echoes the "accidental skin" followed by "and so cold" and drags the consciousness of the poem to the plums. It seems to offer a type of false friendliness, which serves to draw out the perverse deliciousness not of plums but of the act of taking. The afterthought of description reinforces the nonchalance of

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[188] Koch, Kenneth, *Selected Poems 1950-1982* (New York: Random House, 1985), 51.
[189] William Carlos Williams, *Collected Poems 1921-1931,* pref. by Wallace Stevens (New York: The Objectivist Press, 1934), 50.

the two preceding verses. The "icebox" as preservation enters the poem because the plums are cold to eat and the taking is "so sweet." This is not considerateness but is revelling in the deprivation of another in the guise of this kind and gentle warning about something that has already been done. It ultimately suggests the subtlety of communication itself, the irrefutability of the written word. The reader initially tastes the cold sweet plums but the structure of the poem invites him/her to taste the agenda of an act of joyful selfishness. Both kind and unkind, it is a scalpel of a poem that cuts into understanding and is an example of Williams's cruel kindness, secretive and submerged.

These readings demonstrate how "behaviour" can be present in a poem, how the content of the poem is greater than the sum of its parts as the poem exposes vital tensions between people and poetry that the presence of understanding and shared knowledge develops. It explores the alienation of a poem, the potential for cruelty sanctioned by verse, the acceptability of the written word and the power of a friendly tone. The framing of the poem is central to this. While framed as an abandoned note, it is specifically written yet significantly delivered in a spoken tone that epitomises the old phrase "familiarity breeds contempt". This is an example of the "behaviour" of a poem as distinctly *not* what the poem is about but rather *how* it is about. The presence is the poem itself as it enacts a strange chicanery upon the reader, lulling him/her with tone and sweetness yet describing a moment of selfishness that the reader as "you" totally sympathises with because the syntax reveals the most charming elements of selfishness. This invites the reader into the poem's subjectivity yet it is its convincing and sympathetic tone that, as Koch points out, is far from the point. This is a sense of an experience delivered in a poem. While it is evidently not objective, it is engrossing, but this weakness is still highly seductive, a moment that is recognisable and yet somehow indefinable. This is its precise nature. There might be, as Koch suggests, a theatricality to this dialogue but perhaps that incisive quality of the good dramatist is what mobilises this reading of the poem. This link suggests a link to the demonstrably human nature of Kindness in poetry itself, perhaps a moment that is vibrant and singular in its recognisable qualities so the reader can engage with its "behaviour".

## The ethical disadvantages and aesthetic advantages of "universal truth"

As I have discussed already, "universality" itself presents a problem for reading modernist poetry. The notion of a "universal truth" is arcane and can only be reductive because it produces work that creates a relationship with the reader that is, as Woods puts it, an example of the "Master-Servant" relationship.[190] This is because it is predicated upon the epistemological supremacy of the artist and the ethic/aesthetic position that supposes an artist and, by extension, the work is rendered unassailable through a magical combination of knowledge and craft. The reader, by this standard, is merely given instruction by the poem or else the reader works under the poem's instruction.[191] However, belief in a "universal truth" may be a key component in Kindness at this stage because the language that manifestly cleaves to its own certainty enjoys a freedom from responsibility; it answers no questions because it suffers no doubt but demonstrates an affirmation of a world-view that cannot imagine itself being wrong or compromised. It is, in short, arrogant because it makes no apology or effort to the reader. In fact, it doesn't need to because it is entrenched in and convinced by the correctness of its own commitment to culture, ethics and a type of aesthetic presentation that proposes the idea that if it is successful the reader *will* know what it means and s/he will be better for it. It is essentially about power and has the potential for charm and devastation like anything else that feels it is unassailable has. In other words, it enjoys freedom from responsibility to its reader because it can be read in one sense as a sort of syntactically indulged, outlandish and bold playboy type of poetry. I am talking here about the "behaviour" of the poem and the reading of it that implies and infers an attitude towards its, that is the poem's, self. Within a reparative "grammar of reading" that pursues Kindness, the central idea of the self-reflexive invulnerability of the poem renders it not only ethically compromised but also, and perhaps most importantly to Kindness, vulnerable.

The vulnerability of Pound's Imagist project is vital to Kindness because it suggests a primary area within which the aesthetic position and an ethics of

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[190] Woods, 26.

[191] Kenner describes Mallarme's idea that words are hypersymbols of the things they name so "that the word, not anything the word is tied to, is the only substantiality to be discovered in a poem gave Mallarme ecstatic shiver; to command words' potencies was to oversee magic." Kenner, *A Homemade World*, 167.

epistemological totality can coalesce and produce dazzling fragments that can be read as Kind. We can observe that as well as the unencumbered style of free verse, with its musical and vocal qualities unfettered by anxieties of readership, and the Christian, masculine, Hellenic, hetero, middle-class position from which Pound and to a lesser extent Williams write all combine to give these poets leave to be radicals, and in some senses dictators.[192] They do this with great efficacy because they can produce crystalline gemstones or refracted Dada, localist fragments that are engaged with the avant-garde of a culture that considers them to be the most valuable members of society. The logic that mobilizes the Imagists is the "ridding the verbiage" and "direct treatment of the thing" which, if successful, will result in an absolute, unassailable poem-object. This gives the successful Imagist poem its method and its vibrancy but it is important to recognise how this is an ethical consideration that produces an aesthetics aligned with Aestheticism since it follows the trajectory of *l'art pour l'art* that the art for truth Imagist ideology appears. It is an apparent perversion of Kindness, since as a reparative reading seeks to eschew a "paranoid" position, or rather a "hermeneutics of suspicion", it favours a poetics born of totalising ideas of certainty. This is important because it demonstrates what a Kindness, as a "grammar of reading" values aesthetically, what it rails against ethically and what it seeks to renegotiate ultimately. A Kindness reads these Imagist poems as vulnerable, that is, such is their certainty that they are not defensive, they are consequently open in a profound way. Unlike Stein's hermetic objects they do not anticipate attack but are open, which, in a "paranoid" sense, means that we might continue to account for the poems themselves *ad infinitum* but also in the depressed sense in that they are undefended availabilities, "explanatory structures" or unvigilant masters.[193]

A reading of Kindness can take a great deal from these poems once it does not subscribe to the "paranoid" position but rather sees the poem in "behavioural" terms as instances of balletic elitism that can be available. Within the "grammar of reading", that Kindness presents, the poems are not *trying* to be inscrutable but are rather in pursuit of the tautological practice of proving themselves true. The poet is in the poem because s/he need not absent him/herself and this method of reading this leaves him/her conversely vulnerable to Kindness as a "grammar of reading". Poetic

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[192] Perelman observes the significance of the advantages of Pound's birth and the effect that this had upon the poet in contrast to Zukofsky's experiences. This will be expanded upon in the next chapter.
[193] Sedgwick, 135.

presence rather than content is an essential quality of Kindness but it is to be taken for "behaviour" since it represents a vulnerability that will be at stake in all of my subsequent readings. The compelling contradictions of Williams's poems keep this presence perfectly submerged just at the surface of the text, which explains why Kindness might coincide with the poet's esteemed accessibility. Reading Williams in this manner, however, works to draw a starker attention to Pound's apparent inaccessibility and helps to identify the qualities both poets achieve in terms of Kindness as a means to address the close reading methodologies of Kindness. The contrast is essential precisely because Pound is so tricky and in parts convoluted but his difficulties and the attendant moments of Kindness provide the essential foil to the deceptive readiness of Williams's accessible objective Kindness.

As I have demonstrated, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" is a difficult and resistant poem. It is full of references that seem to deter or deflect the reader from the poem itself. Once these references have been deciphered and the Greek, French, and Latin have been translated, the poem still appears to shift and evade comprehension. At first, it seems that unlocking the poem in terms of its many allusions and references is in fact the act of deciphering the poem. This is a deceptive notion. Because the text requires such research it is possible to believe that once completed it will open out and furnish the reader with the suspected value that initially seemed so evasive. The inverted commas, like the dense references, obscure and obstruct the paranoid reader's communication with the poem. The problem remains, however, because the references act as a diversion. After all, full comprehension of the references only reinforces the obvious interpretation that "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" is Pound's summary and rejection of his years in London. While this is evidently a thoroughly substantiated reading of the poem, it renders the text rather didactic, even though it affords a decent purchase on the "mould in plaster", head-shaking weariness that pervades the retrospection of the text. While I don't propose that "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" is not *about* or at least sourced from Pound's relationship with London, this reading does not engage far enough with the text for the purposes of this thesis. It is possible to read "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" as it progresses behind the references and it is likely that what develops is not a dissimilar emotional index from the one apparent in the highly culturally adorned verses. But in order to discuss the full significance of the poem it is necessary to ignore the obscurity of the references.

With Kindness, I propose an alternative to the standard reading of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" content with the idea that it is the now obscure density of references that makes the poem so "other-ly". This facet of the text certainly has the effect of alienation and forces the reader to struggle with comprehension itself. By this reading of course, the poem could not be considered "singular" in Attridge's terms as it seems that the failure of the ideoculture of the text renders it "other", rather than performing the feat of "singularity" that he prescribes. I contend that through Kindness we can find that there is "singularity" in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" and that there are instances of "lively matter" and "vibrancy" that the reparative position can find Kind. Moreover, that this esotericism is the source of alienation and "otherness" is not persuasive enough in terms of Kindness because the text communicates this in ways that are not solely an eloquent demonstration of the reader's academic ignorance. There are ghosts in this machine.

## The "Other" woman in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley"

The language of the poem itself seems to come from various different voices or personæ, meaning coherence is not immediately apparent unless we take the didactic dissolution of Pound's relationship with London as the cohesive thread. Therefore, it is essential to find other chords that run through the poem that is voiceless, fleeting and ever-present in how it presents otherness and oppression simultaneously; a figure that goes further than parody and elliptical references to key figures. There is a shifting and changing presence that reappears throughout the poem and provides the spine expressing the anxiety and isolation that the poem seems to convey, while also seeming to be an anthology of people and points that necessarily ring hollow. It is hollow because of this figure, the "luminous detail" that expresses Pound's assertion that he is "more interested in life than in any part of it".[194] The third sentence of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" begins the first line of the fourth stanza, "His true Penelope was Flaubert".[195] The expression is captivating in numerous ways. Like most allegories, it requires some translation. Penelope is the faithful wife of Odysseus

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[194] Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965,* 23.
[195] Pound, *Personæ,* 185.

and generally represents fidelity as she resisted suitors for twenty years while she awaited Odysseus' return from the Trojan wars. Flaubert, a mid-nineteenth Century French novelist of exacting style and fastidious commitment to accuracy of presentation, was champion of "le mot juste", meaning the right word, and implying a sense of omniscient justice in the semantic allocation. As a result, the line presents a fantastically rich and mixed literary metaphor. Apart from the delightful, relaxing syntax of the line from its lambent and lilting and the almost soothing exhalations on "Penelope" and "Flaubert", it also delivers a certain confused clarity that is present throughout the text. The fusion of Penelope and Flaubert and the romantic connotations of fidelity and marriage, forges a highly textured moment in the poem. The references dip into large fields of knowledge and combine to make a strange and unexpected moment. Gender seems significant but not obvious, as the lines of reference blur between a heroine of the classics and a hero of modern literature, recalling the blur of the smudged moment in Williams's "accidental skin".

This androgynous fusion provides the first glimpse of the figure that haunts "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". The female Penelope is significantly not "true" because she, the symbol of fidelity, is usurped or has eventually surrendered, therefore making Penelope herself false because she is in fact Flaubert. Pound uses Penelope to present an idea of a relationship and then essentially guts the character and fills in the figure she represents with a male novelist. As a result, we have here a woman who is not who she is, making her very presence in the text a negative because she is merely a shadow whose function is to draw the prominent subject into greater relief and clarity. This shadowy figure of a woman reappears throughout the text, shifting and altering the negative form she takes and effectively "backlighting" the apparent "subject" and "characters" that play out in the "forefront" of the text itself. This is reminiscent of "The Red Wheelbarrow" in the way Williams uses the order of presentation to shape and distort the image he has written. The "figure" and the "ground" seem to jostle for prominence, which is unsettling and essentially loud. The figure of the woman is fragmentary and shifting yet her reappearance unites each section and forms an emotional core response that is necessarily present in the text. This "other" woman can be read through the poem as a function of alienation and an almost eerie point in the poetic distance of language; she appears to speak or shimmer to shadow the direction of the text, appearing again in the same stanza as a more sinister "Circe", a fluent transition of the female figure as the sorceress who operates the voice of the

poem. She reappears as voices, as portraits, as a grotesque Madonna. If the reader can bear her in mind, a whole subplot appears and runs as a counter-current to the deluge of references that tumble forth from the poem itself.

I have mentioned Jennison's response to Huyssen's assertions that "Mass culture has always been the hidden subject of the modernist project".[196] The focus of Kindness is the readerly experience, which is contingent on the "ideoculture" of the reader. Huyssen's text discusses the impact of mass culture on avant-garde, High Modernist culture by exploring how modern mass culture is implicitly and explicitly presented as female. This argument supports my reading of "Hugh Sewlyn Mauberley" as haunted by a spectral woman because it suggests she represents mass culture. While this reading began as an intuitive analysis of the poem's "behaviour" to foreground the implicit "poethical" responsibilities of the reading of Kindness in the text. The following analysis will adapt the model that Jennison to the Objectivists in terms of Huyssen, and instead focus on reading the resonances of Huyssen in "Hugh Sewlyn Mauberley" therefore developing a theoretical perspective while advocating for a reparative "grammar of reading" through Kindness.

Huyssen begins his chapter "Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other" with a passage on Flaubert, describing *Madame Bovary* as "one of the founding texts of modernism" before continuing to explore the implications of Flaubert's claim that "Madame Bovary, c'est moi".[197] This lends an interesting inflection to Pound's line "His true Penelope was Flaubert".[198] Suddenly the woman that haunts Flaubert and the poem is the failed, petit bourgeois, romantic Emma Bovary and all she represents, which Huyssen suggests is mass culture itself, the "feuillton novels, popular and family magazine, the stuff of lending libraries, fictional bestsellers and the like".[199] Quoting Nietzsche he argues that "the danger for the artists, for geniuses…is woman".[200] Huyssen discusses how the masses are characterized as female in order to describe their irrationality and the fear they provoked in bourgeois masculinity that comes to define the "male mystique" in modernism. He describes this personification of male anxiety as "the haunting specter of a loss of power [that] combines with fear of losing one's fortified and stable ego boundaries, which represent the *sine qua non*

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[196] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1986), 47.
[197] Huyssen, 44; 45.
[198] Pound, *Personæ,* 185.
[199] Huyssen, 49.
[200] Huyssen, 51.

of male psychology in that bourgeois order... modernism's own fears of being sphinxed".[201] Huyssen's observation of the woman as "modernism's other" can also be seen in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" since a reparative reading of the poem according to Kindness observes the "singularity" of the appearance of the "other" in Attridge's sense. It also allows for a reading that mobilizes "vibrant materiality" to inflect the readerly experience as it observes the poem as an assemblage of objects or things in order to recognize the shimmer of the "actant", in this case, the "other" woman.

The figure of the "female other" changes in form dramatically within the poem. In the first half of the poem up to and including "ENVOI (1919)", she is an amorphous object of contempt yet one possessing a perverse and pervasive power, thus making her correspond to Huyssen's interpretation. Subsequently, the female figure is very much that which fascinates and eludes Mauberley himself; she is fixed and cold, unreal, and lacking the fleshy changeability of the figure seen in the first half. Rather than a cast of women, it is useful to read the female in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" as one varied version of "otherness" in this sense my reading aligns with Huyssen's argument. Section III begins with the female:

> The tea-rose tea-gown, etc.
> Supplants the mousseline of Cos,
> The pianola "replaces"
> Sappho's barbitos.[202]

The rhythmic condescension in its up-swinging iambic and the repetitive, nursery rhyme of "tea-rose tea-gown" in the first line is fully and curtly punctuated by the flippancy of "etc.". The repetition of "tea", and the presence of the "rose" and the "gown" have a forcefully "ladylike" quality, suggesting something pale pink and dainty like afternoon tea or a nursery rhyme and evoking frocks and lawns, a wonderfully kaleidoscopic artifice. The "etc." describes the acute criticism present within the line as the abbreviation observes the unthinking imprecise quality of such a scene. However, the scene is not too benign because it has ousted the classics, while suffocation is implied in the fabric and the repetition. The oppression that the "tea-rose tea-gown" represents is far from pleasant and delicate since it feels rather sinister

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[201] Huyssen, 53.
[202] Pound, *Personæ*, 186.

as the light chatter of the pinks and the implied lace presents the obliteration of history and ancient art and knowledge. The female who sits in the sunny garden in prettiness is attributed a certain type of power of destruction and ignorance: mass culture versus the heroism of the male modernist. In contrast to the gutted Penelope whose form sketched out a commitment to *le mot juste*, the female has reappeared in a capacity that is deceptive and cloying, giggling in an act of destruction. The female present in the first half of the text is, if not passive, often destructive because her shape shifts as she provides an unspeakable presence as an object of nameless responsibility. She is drawn in vivid and fleeting sketches, appearing at numerous points in gardens, paintings, salons and trenches.

The figure of the destructive female appears with startling ferocity and violence in the second WWI stanza:

> There died a myriad,
> And of the best, among them,
> For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
> For a botched civilization,[203]

The violence of this figure is thoroughly enhanced by the repeated physicality of the chomping "old bitch" and "botched". It's a horrifying, almost gothic, image of the gummy pink and dangerously powerful destroyer of the taught and tawny, barbito strumming vision of the classical past. The pink of roses and gowns has now become the corrupted gums in the rotting mouth of a vicious hag who was categorically not worth defense. It is logical and likely that this "old bitch" represents Britannia, the feminine personification of England itself. Or indeed in more literal relation to human age and decay, Queen Victoria herself, thus allowing for a critique of Imperialism as a cause of war. This interpretation, which is an easy one to follow, reinforces the argument for the "female other". The strange and particular urge to gender and personify England is reasonably turned on its head in bitter criticism. Significantly, it is the "female other" that once again emerges. In this instance she may appear to be evoking England but she also evidently shadows the text. That is, rather than a new female figure, she represents the continuity of futility, fear, alienation and isolation that visits the poem throughout its "narrative." It stands to reason that this amorphous female can and should inhabit Britannia and haunt the poem itself.

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[203] Pound, *Personæ*, 188.

The poem then makes a sudden lurch backwards. There is a certain urgency with which the verses concerning WWI appear in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" that is enhanced by the sudden jump back to the Pre-Raphaelites and other Victorians of perhaps more contemporary eminence, such as John Ruskin and Prime Minister William Gladstone. The section immediately following is entitled "YEUX GLAUQUES", meaning "eyes that are sea green", or more specifically, referring to eyes that are cold, still and almost lifeless yet beautiful. The female "old bitch" vanishes and next to appear is the figure of Elizabeth Siddal, the Pre-Raphaelite muse who critics like Ruthven and Kenner argue is the female source of this section. By following the "female other" throughout the various sections of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", it is possible to make a stronger and more compelling reading of the poem as a whole rather than just interpreting it as a text comprised of independent poems. Reading the poem in this way allows one to form a more cohesive and useful idea of the role the "female other" has within the poem and determine whether she represents the "other", oppression, alienation, Britannia or any of her other manifestations. Regardless, she serves as a highly satisfying emotional spine for the whole dispersed poem that lends a strong character to the poem, perhaps even an enemy or object that commonly unites the poem itself. As such, the female can be read to have a much more powerful and forceful elemental role in the behaviour of the poem.

"YEUX GLAUQUES" can certainly be read as referring to Siddal's life since Dante Gabriel Rossetti, her lover and eventual husband, is mentioned and quoted. The last verse refers specifically to their relationship and to Rossetti's public and prolific infidelity. The character of Siddal, however, does not appear in the poem, rather it is her image or her portrait that we see, "Beata Beatrix" posthumous and ecstatic. She presents in the text *how* she has been painted and *what* has been done to her. She is a sorry but beautiful muse because her physical features are prominent in the poem, which is arguably named after her eyes, or more specifically paintings of her eyes. Her eyes are referred to on numerous occasions, which is of real significance given that Siddal died in 1862. Pound could only have seen portraits of her yet her "gaze" almost solely concerns the poem because she is only observed, she cannot see. Her gaze is the fiction and function of painting, it is contained and unchanging, "The Burne-Jones cartons/Have preserved her eyes", she is at once empowered and neutralised:

Thin like brook-water,
With a vacant gaze.
The English Rubaiyat was still-born
In those days.

The thin, clear gaze, the same
Still darts out faun-like from the half-ruin'd face,
Questioning and passive. . . .
"Ah, poor Jenny's case" . . . [204]

The female here is an unmoving, unresponsive and tragic figure presenting stillness, a weakened objective figure that perhaps even shows a sort of gothic remorse in her passive and sorrowful beauty. She is a comfortable mould for the female to fit into. Siddal famously sat for Ophelia, Beatrix, the Lady of Shalott, Isabella and numerous other figures. She, like the "female other" in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", represents and presents various characters, suggesting a symbiotic relationship with the individual and the painting, and by extension the female and the poem. This facet of the female necessarily reveals her to be precisely absent from who she is painted as. In turn, the chosen shape of the female in that instance to be the woman is the model who is painted as her, the model poses as Elizabeth Siddal as opposed to Elizabeth Siddal posing as the model. This act of fictionalising both parties is an illuminating way to consider the role and fluidity of the "female other" in the poem.

The preservation of Siddal's eyes leads to a weird and sinister bent in the "SIENA MI FE'; DISCFECEMI MAREMMA" section, which begins with "pickled fœtuses and bottled bones".[205] It refers to Rossetti's poem "Jenny", which is a loving indictment of prostitution that takes place in a prostitute's bedroom, but readjusts in this section, "Dowson found harlots cheaper than hotels".[206] In "BRENNBAUM", the eyes are "sky-like" and "limpid" in contrast to the sea-green "brook water" gaze of the "YEUX GLAUQUES" section. In addition, submerged in "BRENNBAUM" is a strange, grotesque Madonna figure who can be found holding "The circular infant's face" but is rendered absurd in "The stiffness from spats to collar".[207] This reading is made possible by the portrait-like quality of the first two lines. The pastel blue and Renaissance circularity of the face suggest paintings of Christ as a baby and the title

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[204] Pound, *Personæ*, 189; 189.
[205] Pound, *Personæ*, 190.
[206] Pound, *Personæ*, 190.
[207] Pound, *Personæ*, 191.

of the previous section refers to birth, "SIENA MI FE" meaning "Siena gave me birth". The typical virginal stillness of the portraits of Siddal in the "YEUX GLAUQUES" poem is also worth noting. These factors create an atmosphere ripe for reading the Madonna into the text since Christ the infant is very often held, doted on and watched over by his mother Mary. The biblical references that begin the second stanza of this section reinforce this reading, even if their absurdity make them almost sacrilegious. The female is only implied by the presence of a child and so the extolled and sorrowful still image of the woman is replaced by the weird adult/child Madonna image that is highly ridiculous. The female's power, then, is demonstrably extremely changeable and her role, though constant, is to be the object of unsayable moments of feeling. In this sense, her function as the subject for the emotional core-narrative of the poem is much more significant than the catalogue providing the context for her appearances. Significantly, it is the context that defines the female, emphasising the solely symbiotic relationship between the context, or landscape, of the poem and its emotional core. She is affected and effected by the language that forms her and is specifically a presence though markedly not a "contact" because she does not represent specific content. Here is the shadowy figure of the "other" "woman" in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", the presence of experience and manifest response, not an "objective correlative" but rather a "vibrant singularity" in reading.

This might explain why there is the temptation to call "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" Kind and the difficulty a reader could have in locating these essential moments. The appearance, disappearance and use of the female do not represent the same moments as the "accidental skin" in Williams but they work to service an idea of Kindness in narratives that has been characterized as resisting Kindness because these instances, or moments, cannot be sustained. However, the female as a mirage or a reoccurring, layered developing figure that can be recognized or known in the context of the poem provides a strange, diluted moment of "vibrant singularity" or "behaviour" that can be achieved and sustained within the poem as a whole. The figure allows the reader to engage with the "behaviour" of the poem itself rather than the necessary translation and deciphering that it initially seems to demand. As Pound is exorcising daemons in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", they can appear for the reader and these moments of alienation and horror are what permit a "grammar of reading" to experience a Kindness. Importantly, therefore, such moments demonstrate how this might be maintained, particularly in the context of a narrative.

The "MAUBERLEY" section encircles the "female other" rather than being circled by her. Possession has been assumed yet it is a capture or indeed a conquest that necessarily neutralizes the responsive relationship between the voice of the poem and the role of the woman, and by extension the poem itself and the "female other". The "female other" and that figure's consuming, ghostly power is all but explicitly referred to in the second section:

> For three years, diabolus in the scale,
> He drank ambrosia,
> All passes, ANANGKE prevails,
> Came end, at last, to that Arcadia,
>
> He had moved amid her phantasmagoria,
> Amid her galaxies,
> NUKTOS AGALMA
> . . . . . . .
> Drifted … drifted precipitate,
> Asking time to be rid of …
> Of his bewilderment; to designate
> His new found orchid. …[208]

"For three years" engenders a recognition that is located within the text. The phrase is the first line of the whole poem itself, meaning this reflection on previous lines refracts understanding in reading. It is simultaneously clarifying and disruptive. Repetition usually presents the reinforcement of an idea or theme, or a rhythmic or syntactical technique. However, this reflection suggests a new perspective in the poem, the reflection of an earlier moment in the poem points the reader back to the past of the poem and also of the act of reading the poem itself. This is why the return of the female is so significant and the very different respect in which she is treated is so essential to note. She is much more observed than experienced, as she is in the first half. There is a great distance now between her and the subject and voice of the poem. At this point, the poem has effectively spread itself out, almost in order to achieve better clarity. It is physically detangling itself, hence Pound's use of ellipses here. However, the strands that are now set apart from each other do not necessarily clarify each other or anything at all. Rather, the voice is experienced in the act of receding and instead of gaining perspective, the poem makes miniatures. The drama of distance is played out in these strange contrasts of the universe and medallions. Largeness and

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[208] Pound, *Personæ*, 197.

smallness are so inherent and so incompatible to the poem itself that they separate and presentation so thoroughly recognizes its limits that it turns cold and clinical. The poem no longer rages or lusts in disgust at the female, rather it does its best to contain her by rendering her in porcelain and seeking her in text books. This is a lonely sort of victory for the aesthete, one that clearly orders the inexplicable elements of pathos in "MAUBERLEY."

The passage suggests a hot-house, the envelopment of female night and the naming of an orchid. Timelessness here encourages growth and yet stifles because the stillness of the oblivion of space suspends Mauberley the aesthete. Pound would not have known about zero gravity but the celestial mass that Mauberley is adrift in is perfectly fitting. This is the contrast of space and size, "He had moved amid her phantasmagoria,/ Amid her galaxies". The tiny Mauberley is engulfed in the enormity of seductive and huge oblivion, unable to anchor himself but for naming the alien looking orchid. The contrast of this swathe of the galaxy he swims in is pinpointed precisely in the bizarre nature of this alien female flower. This again demonstrates the anxiety that Huyssen elucidates in his work as the woman, he argues, represents the mass culture that the modernist project is set directly against. In this sense, mass culture is feminized as it is represented as unintelligent, romantic and irrational, as opposed to the scientific quality of "truth" that modernism imbues aesthetics with. Mass culture, like woman, is perceived as presenting a dangerous lure, as Huyssen explains: "The lure of mass culture, after all, has traditionally been described as the threat of losing oneself in dreams and delusions and of merely consuming rather than producing".[209] The lines "He had moved amid her phantasmagoria,/Amid her galaxies" are not just spatial but demonstrate a particular "poethical" moment that the "grammar of reading" as Kindness binds together through "behavioural" readings. The enfeebled figure of Mauberley drifts in wonder and uncertainty as the poem has the urge to explore on both a vast and a tiny scale. The drift and the oppression of curious delight are present in the stilled and stilted, yet certainly romantic, lines, "To be certain . . . certain . . ./(Amid ærial flowers)".[210] The thread here slips and the ellipses serve almost as a reminder of the ground for the poem itself as it drifts. The squeal of "Luini in porcelain" is then a welcomed solidity to the floating loss of the

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[209] Huyssen, 55.
[210] Pound, *Personæ*, 197.

preceding verses because it is containable and finite.[211] The tawdry manageability of Reinach and the aversion of the cold, elemental female is Mauberley the aesthete's legacy.

Having argued that the catalogue of references in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" functions as more of an obstacle to reading than a responsible skeleton of poetic structure, it is clear that references and allusions also function in the poem as instruments of alienation themselves. As the dense cultural awareness of the poem seems to alienate the reader, it also performs an inverted instance of alienation within the text itself. The poem ends in a diminuendo of fragile and flimsy collages of references almost like the temporarily complete ashes that disintegrate upon contact of burnt book pages. The "MEDALLION" section is so preoccupied with reference that it is practically labyrinthine in its inherent deception and merciless coldness, reading in exile. It begins with an almost pathological glee, with the exclamation mark and the necessarily high pitch of the "Luini". However, the phrasing and gentility of the syntax and the rhythm almost seem like an antidote to this sheer difficulty of decoding, which can be read as a reflection of Mauberley's experience in the galaxy/hot-house trying to name orchids. This does not necessarily mean Kindness, although such synthesis is devastatingly moving. The work the reader must do in this sense can be seen to bear similarities to the demands that Williams's poems make. Pound is without question a more "academic" taskmaster. However, as there is some release and relief for the reader in Mauberley's final exhalation in "MEDALLION", there is also some gleeful vicious fury in the reading of "This is just to say". Each poem forces something on the reader or at least offers them not a description of something to illuminate their understanding but the possibility of sharing understating within the forum of the poem itself. The readerly "actant" in "vibrant materiality" or "singularity" as Attridge terms it "arises from the works constitution as a set of active relations put in play in the reading, that never settle into a fixed configuration".[212] The whole poem is as follows:

> Luini in porcelain!
> The grand piano
> Utters a profane
> Protest with her clear soprano.

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[211] Pound, *Personæ*, 202.
[212] Attridge, 68.

> The sleek head emerges
> From the god-yellow frock
> As Anadyomene in the opening
> Pages of Reinach.
>
> Honey-red, closing the face-oval,
> A basket-work of braids which seem as if they were
> Spun in King Minos' hall
> From metal, or intractable amber;
>
> The face-oval beneath the glaze,
> Bright in its suave bounding-line, as,
> Beneath half-watt rays,
> The eyes turn topaz.[213]

The animation of the figure of the Luini/Melzi painting is an extraordinary feat as the poem seems to study the painting and in doing so animates the female figure, as though the agency of the text might get inside the agency, the actual paint, of the figure. The poem, in this sense, is about looking, or rather the poem looks. Crucially, in its active looking, the poem momentarily takes possession of the image it regards and the image undulates with the "sleek" undulations of the poem. Finally, "The eyes turn topaz". There is a beautifully alphabetic quality and finality to ending the whole poem on the letter "z", as though the satisfactions of childhood reading and learning are being echoed here. The repeated "t" brings the words to the front of the mouth and presents a pizzicato yet soft ending. Note that Pound's sense of the alphabetical is evident in his caustic and phonetic spelling, his work on the Chinese Ideogram, and not to mention his *ABC of Reading*.

The ending, however, also presents a hardening or a frosting over of the notion that the poem is actively looking. That is, while the poem is active in its engaged gaze, it continues to act upon itself by using the image as a catalyst for its development. The poem seems almost unaware of the unresponsiveness of the image before it, it seems somehow to over stimulate the image as an expression of longing for a returned gaze. As "The eyes turn topaz" there is the sense that the poem is left alone. This idea comes from the sense that the poem gripped the image so forcefully that it fed off of it. This returns us to an idea of knowledge that feeds the poem itself. In a similar gesture to the IV and V sections of the poem, the final section seeks to

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[213] Pound, *Personæ*, 202.

*know* what it does not and in this sense it becomes a poem about poetry. It, the poem, its very posture, compensates for its sense of not knowing by using its own substance to simulate knowing itself. This is complicated because it refers to vulnerability. The apparent lack of vulnerability in this poem is reflected in the certainty with which it seems to know itself. Its boldness and its sense of accountability lie within its own machinations, making it perhaps an artifice. Yet the beginning of the chapter posed a question about whether the painting was a Luini at all. It seems that certainty is not contingent on what me might call correctness or what we might understand to be thought of as truth. Rather, certainty may be posture and self-assurance a lack of doubt. This is an interesting aspect of the "behavioural" in terms of Kindness in poetry. It can be argued that it presents a sort of "behavioural" artifice in a poem because the reader has wrestled with this artifice throughout and has either been persuaded or has not. There are moments resembling Kindness in the poem but its lack of self-consciousness has been a vital point of discussion as it provides a new development in the function of Kindness. That is, a new and important facet in terms of examining "behaviour" in poems in order to determine Kindness is apparent. This notion of self-consciousness and vulnerability will be central to the subsequent chapters and the analyses therein.

## Versions of aesthetic, and formal certainty : the implications for "behaviour"

To return again to *Spring and All*, poem "VII" provides a remarkable example of musicality and syntax as the agents of literal form and the sculpted containment of colour with edges. The first stanza reads:

> The sunlight in a
> yellow plaque upon the
> varnished floor [214]

The form of this verse is so percussive in its rhythms that is seems to make a yellow square on the floor. It is reasonable to assume that a plaque is square-shaped but I

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[214] Williams, *Imaginations*, 109.

would argue that the squareness of the directed sunlight is not just implied in the plaque or indeed the physical shape of the verse itself. The square runs through the verse, as though its corners were jutting through the three lines:

> The **S**unlight in a
> yellow pla**qu**e upon the
> **var**nishe**d** floor

I include this observation as it seems to illustrate a percussive musicality that enriches and moulds the verse itself. The imbedded square subtly makes itself known as a submerged shape that reinforces the image Williams presents. This rhythmic presence simplifies the shape further so that the reader senses the square through reading and it (the square) appears in the imagination. Significantly, there are edges in the square of light as it falls on the floor, so the square shores up the reader's imagined solid square of light. The distinction is crisp, an almost brutal line of contrasting light and dark. The strange starkness of the contrast captures the eye and establishes a light in which the reader experiences as being all about the light. The almost thick sense of light in the passage suggests an interior by Edward Hopper. Williams achieves the same level of instinctive understanding and knowledge of the image through syntax, form and structure.

Poem "VII" continues:

> is full of a song
> inflated to
> fifty pounds pressure
>
> at the faucet of
> June that rings
> the triangle of the air
>
> pulling at the
> anemones in
> Persephone's cow pasture—
> […]²¹⁵

Here the panel of light is compounded by the intensity and heat of the light itself, the June sun stifles and fills the square. The "triangle" of the second verse forms a

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²¹⁵ Williams, *Imaginations*, 109.

hypotenuse, it acutely bisects the air, rendering the atmosphere thick with heat and light. The suggestion of the angular evokes strong shafts of sunlight ("slants", if you will) as it scorches through the windows. The brightness and heat of summer fits into and fills up the square. The "varnished floor" vanishes and the ground has become "Persephone's cow pasture."

Williams certainly does not flinch from European classical mythology, but he does not use it quite as Pound does to create small, pocketed tableaux, brief sketches submerged beneath the text, which conjure whatever allusion Pound makes and thus couch the verse itself in rich corridors of classical and contemporaneous cartoons. [216] Kenner draws an ambiguous distinction between Pound's use of myth and Williams's. In Pound, Kenner writes, "The words stick to the business of rendering sensations, so that the myth, the radiant event, will be handed over to us actual. Then if we "interpret," we interpret the myth, as anthropologists did in the nineteenth century. Which is a way to work, but not Williams's way".[217] Kenner's suggestion reinforces Pound's convictions about "the way of the scientist". The fourth verse of the segment "E. P. Ode pour L'Election de son Sepulchre" is as follows:

> His true Penelope was Flaubert,
> He fished by obstinate isles;
> Observed the elegance of Circe's hair
> Rather than the mottoes on sun-dials.[218]

The hero of Pound's poem takes on the persona of a modern, literary Odysseus, where Mythology serves as a conduit for experience. "Penelope", consequently, is not a simile, she is a metaphor. This use of classical references is problematic when reading Pound. Referring back to his writing on the Chinese method of describing or naming colour he writes, "The Chinese 'word' or ideogram for red is based on something everyone KNOWS". "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" is littered with references to Classical, Victorian, and contemporary European culture. These fragments of knowledge are not the same as the "roses," "cherries," "flamingos" or the "iron rust" he describes as forming a visual, poetic image or idea of red. They are far more esoteric than the edges of petals because they speak a language, the understanding of

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[216] Kenner begins "Classroom Accuracies" by mentioning Pound's Penn education. He swiftly moves on to note that "Williams was never in a college classroom, not until, decades later, he lectured in them." Kenner, *A Homemade World*, 159.
[217] Kenner, *A Homemade World*, 188.
[218] Pound, *Personæ*, 185.

which hinges on education and prior knowledge of a vast array of classical and literary history.

While the potentially diverging poetic and aesthetic politics of Pound and Williams has been a key topic in this chapter, I would argue that while the former's arsenal is very different from what the latter presents, Pound is still engaging in a very similar project to dismantle the barriers between reading, experience and imagination. Williams's high density, patch of hard June light pulls "at the/anemones in/Persephone's cow pasture". There is a spirit in the act that may vandalise, steal from or even deface the Classics. The cow pasture itself smacks of the agrarian cattle herding "New World" that Williams is constantly trying to account for or wring out for a new and un-derivative culture. It is not a nationalistic cry for pride by any means but he certainly engages colour and syntactical simplicity in order to achieve his version of direct communication in poetry that seems to make, or indeed has made, an American farmyard a poetic icon. The relationship Williams has with America throughout *Spring and All* is not, it should be noted, simple but it does display a certain local devotion in contrast to the hero of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", who:

> …had been born
> In a half savage country, out of date;
> Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn;
> Capaneus; trout for factitious bait;[219]

The relationship with America is already for Pound shrouded in classical mythology. For Pound, whose Promethean struggle with poetry itself engages a field that, unlike Williams's, wishes to cleave itself to European classicism in order to reinvigorate poetry. While this is certainly not the only difference between Williams and Pound, it has important implications for an aesthetic comparison of the two. However, aesthetics are negotiable in their subjectivity and it is with this negotiation that my project is preliminarily concerned. Or phrased another way, neither Eurocentricity nor American-ness can be read as defining the "behaviour", or dictating the Kindness of a poem, however, as I will argue, the Objectivists or, the work of the poets who wrote briefly under that banner, engage this American tension further, as they write and negotiate a notion exile as both "new" Americans and artists in a "new" America.

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[219] Pound, *Personæ*, 185.

# Chapter 4. Kindness and Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The'": Assimilation and "The desire for an inclusive object."[220]

> *"The direction of this prose, though it will be definition, will also be poetry, arising from the same source as the poetry—a poetically charged mentality. Though perhaps gratifying to the poet whose poem is under observation—this prose, with all its poetic direction and right impetus, should, to the critic himself with his merely poetically charged mentality, seem secondary even tertiary and less; i.e. compared with an act which is a poem."[221]*

"Poem beginning 'The'" is in many respects a nightmare of a poem. It was among the first poems Zukofsky sent to Pound in Rapallo in an exchange that brought about their fruitful, albeit sometimes fraught, and enduring relationship. The poem itself is riddled, like "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", with allusions, references, quotations and figures that distinctly unnerve and disorientate the reader. Yet there is still the voice that strains with the verbally indecorous moments we might find in Williams. A glancing gesture here and there pulls the reader to the very breast of the poem only to seemingly mock him/her as s/he is forced back by this foil of reference to test the virtuosity of readership. This is the central paradox in "Poem beginning 'The'": it seems to strain, to beg to *mean* something, yet simultaneously embattles itself in books by other people that were not, at that moment, being read. It is vital to remember, therefore, that it is the poem that is being read. Woods explains this apparent struggle by observing that the poem "seeks an aesthetic rationale that can adequately approach the modern social experiences of the Jew in Manhattan in 1920 and yet is continuously finding that models available are inaccessible and alienating".[222] In this assertion, Woods is illustrating how the poem is a consistent,

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[220] Zukofzky, *Prepositions+,* 15.
[221] Zukofzky, *Prepositions+,* 14-15.
[222] Woods's *Poetics of the Limit* examines Zukofsky's major work "A" in intricate detail and delivers a strong case for a more formal and ethical distinction to be made between Pound's cantos and Zukofsky's work. In building his argument, Woods compares "Poem Beginning 'The'" to Eliot's "The Waste Land" as a means by which to highlight the antecedents of Zukofsky's major departures from

"incessant" negotiation with the "limits" of expression within the hegemonic modernist poetics. This struggle is central to my reading of the poem and in many respects characterizes the notional Kindness I find therein.

The implicit paradox of the struggle for expression in the poem begs the question: why? Why, that is, attempt to operate within modes that defeat one's purpose. This is presumably at the heart of the paradox, that such defeat, I would suggest, is the purpose. This thinking leads to a subsequent question: what efficacy can we judge the poem by in terms of the "paranoid" position. If we consider Pound's encyclopedic ballad of alienation, "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", is just that. This thesis is not satisfied with a solution that proposes that "Poem beginning 'The'" is meant to demonstrate alienation. The poem clearly enacts alienation, as Woods observes, but it does not alienate the reader. Once again, however, this is not satisfactory. Kindness as the subject of this thesis has been discussed in previous chapters as being evinced in moments of reparative reading, poethical responsibility through notions of "behaviour", clarity, and cruel incision, and the delicate balance of vulnerability and ego, the effort to confront the importability indeed improbability of meaning and the implications of these notions for the reader. But Kindness here meets a new and somehow mired set of obstacles and examining them in this early work of Zukofsky's is essential to the stretching out of Kindness, to the thesis itself.

The premise so far, or at least the justification, for an investigation into and hunting down of Kindness has hinged on the notion that a poem can be read in terms that depend on whether or not it is able to communicate in the "behavioural," aesthetic/ethic mode discussed, its semantic content notwithstanding since the key term has been "behaviour." The ideas of "thing-ness," "vibrant materiality," "singularity" and "responsibility" have all been crucial in the examination of Kindness and its attendant ideology that a poem can be read as a unit of independent syntactical agency. The crucial point of evaluation has been *how* the poem does so, with its success measured by evidence in syntax, in rhythm, and sound that transcends the verbal as a moment of sharing. The two long texts explored already have been representative of highly contrasting movements to the same purpose. One of the

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Pound and first generation American modernism. While this is not the intention of my particular analysis, I agree with Woods' assessment and find it extremely useful in making my case for a reading of Kindness that must make aesthetic and ethical negotiations through poetic notions of "behaviour" in order to read Kindness through Pound, Zukofsky *et al* as an alternative, reparative methodological position. Woods, 51.

defining characteristics of the presence of Kindness in these two very stylistically distinct texts has been, and remains, synthesis, which makes them particularly successful in terms of "vibrancy" and "singularity." The moment of unity between form, syntax and rhythm does differ from Pound's prescription but not too much, because it goes further to complete a readerly experience of knowing, rather than the poem's experience of showing.

Zukofsky, I will argue, seems to repudiate this type of synthesis. The synthesis of the farmer's daughter's skin in Williams and the "eye deep in hell" experience of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" is present in "Poem beginning 'The'", yet Zukofsky's poem presents a new negotiation, a sense of self-protectiveness that troubles the reader of Kindness in Pound and Williams. Such protectiveness is striking because it leaves lines numbered and blank, the most impervious demonstration of potential. This distinction is not a brand new observation, however, I propose to develop it in the reparative direction of Kindness. That is, the political poetics of Zukofsky's career as seen in "Poem Beginning 'The'" will be read as an earlier manifestation of his modernist negotiations because part of the interest of Kindness is the nascent negotiations with the previously totalizing aesthetic ethics of first wave American modernism. The poem's "behaviour", I will demonstrate, evinces a force of preservation and fear, with the urge to declare and confuse and the physical yank of "Speaking about epics, mother" implying a joke that tugs at the question, is one's own mother one's own epic?[223] Vulnerability has been discussed in the first chapters as a means to read Stein and a way of approaching Pound and Williams. The hermetic security of Stein's *Tender Buttons* was illuminating and problematic in relation to a discourse of reparative Kindness but it was valuable to reason out and examine why Stein does not achieve the Kindness in question and now it is valuable to recall that reason, as vulnerability itself resurfaces in "Poem beginning 'The'" and marks out new parameters for an investigation of Kindness.

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[223] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 15.

# Zukofsky in "Exile": Assimilation, vulnerability, and the "theme of offense"

Charles Bernstein describes Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The'" as a work that is "reverbative anti-assimilationist".[224] Here, Bernstein is identifying Zukofsky's inherent resistance in "Poem Beginning 'The'" as a stance against assimilation and the struggle this stance brings about, which is a convincing and indeed a satisfying way of reading the poem, because it invites further interpretation of the posture of the piece itself. Furthermore, Bernstein also finds this anti-assimilationism in Stein's work and produces a compelling argument for resistance as the catalyst for Stein's departure from the individual or the poetic individual, indeed the individual poetic, in her work. He identifies how in her position as a female (lesbian) Jew and as an artist, Stein occupies a position that is potentially so utterly drenched in an "other" identity that as an individual she can/could be identified by markers which render her "different". These markers are beyond her control in terms of self-identification because the assertion of the/her self is an act of assimilation. An attempt to write herself into a roughly Christian/Hellenic/Heterosexual discourse, that is, into modernist literature as traditionally defined, would inevitably appear to be an effort of overt declaration of those aforementioned markers, i.e. her lesbianism and/or her Judaism, and therefore, an assimiliationist negotiation of the paradigm. To this end, difference or otherness in contrast to the hegemony is defining the self in terms that consume the poetic. In order to avoid this, Bernstein argues that is she is compelled to always be "writing beyond identity".[225] He also argues that Stein's anti-identity is "utopian. But then only someone who has felt trapped needs to imagine freedom".[226] Bernstein's awareness of Stein's work as identity negotiation is illuminating, particularly as he reads this theme as symptomatic of a sense of self-conscious vulnerability of identity itself, while also accounting for Stein's socio-economic privilege as a facilitating factor for the poet. His argument corresponds with the Whistler protestation from the preface "*She is, withal, selfishly occupied with her own perfection—only having no desire to teach—seeking and finding the beautiful in all*

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[224] Charles Bernstein, "Objectivist Blues: Scoring Speech in Second-Wave Modernist Poetry and Lyrics" in *American Literary History*, 20:1 (Spring/Summer 2008), 347.
[225] Charles Bernstein, *My Way: Speeches and Poems*, *My Way: Speeches and Poems* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 143.
[226] Bernstein, *My Way*, 143.

*conditions and in all times*".[227] That is, the aesthetic renouncement of responsibility can be read into Stein's hermetic gems in *Tender Buttons*. Bernstein's comments on Stein's resistance to self-declaration reflect his sympathetic reading of an American Jewish person in Europe as one that is inherently objectified as other on the one hand and as subject on the other, imagining the permanence of the demand "May I see your Identity Card, Please?"[228]

In a somewhat brusque manner, Bernstein conflates Zukofsky and Stein's Judaism, describing them using Isaac Deutscher's term as "non-Jewish Jews". This comparison hinges on the Jewish religion and the innumerable implications that their own Judaism had for both Stein and Zukofsky. Throughout Bernstein's analysis of "Poem Beginning 'The'", religion emerges in terms of narrative, the icon, and the figures that emerge from broad understandings of the breadth of Christianity and Judaism. These considerations will be relevant to this chapter however, my intention is not to focus solely on the specificities of the effects of Zukofsky's Judaism in "Poem Beginning 'The'". In addition, the effects of Zukofsky's Marxism will not be a primary focus although it will be implicitly addressed.

Kindness as reparative reading will be explored through close, creative reading, which seeks to avoid "paranoid" positions but cannot ignore these subjects as they are inherently part of the academic ideoculture. I will thus read the complicated "otherness" of Stein and Zukofsky as the engendering of a certain vulnerability, in a literary moment, that so utterly relies on notions of the possibility of the "universal truth" as a hegemonic white/male/Christian/Hellenic truth. That is to say, a perspective or experience that deviates from the white/male/Christian/Hellenic must necessarily complicate the "universal truth". When confronting or contributing to an ideological aesthetic based on this "ideal" of truth, that which is "other" is not only vulnerable in exposure but equally exposes vulnerability in the deeply compromised hegemonic notion of truth that occupies the central poetic stage, thus rendering the poem "singular". The utterance of vulnerability, even if it is as the result of identity negotiations, will be essential to progress in the reading of Kindness. This can be summarily described as the "behavioural" shift in the poems that I write on. Whereas Stein's vulnerability seems to prohibit utterance in favour of syntactic polish,

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[227] James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Mr. Whistler's "Ten O'Clock"* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1888), 8.
[228] Bernstein, *MyWay*, 143.

Zukofsky's vulnerability demands declaration and denial. The uncertainty vulnerability represents and indeed presents is the catalyst for the development of this reading of Kindness. His self-imposed negotiation of a high modernist aesthetic doctrine, combined with his developed caustic uncertainty, provides a stronger spine for reading Kindness as the poet achieves instances of humanness and poetics that suffer reparative readings well in a crucially different manner than Stein, for one, but certainly for Pound and Williams also. Manner itself is an important consideration because it suggests method or "behaviour" and, by extension, that troubled term meaning.

This argument lends an interesting shade to the reading of Zukofsky because both he and Stein are seen to be negotiating identity through a position that is inherently anti-assimilationist, which accounts for the nagging notion of vulnerability and defensiveness in my reading of Stein and my temptation to identify the same nags in Zukofsky. However, if we accept Bernstein's theory, we might further explore the fact that if Stein's position on identity is departure and beyond anti-assimilation and identity as an overt presence in a poetic text, does this evince a sort of syntactical absconding or an abandonment. This is the Steinian mode of defense against assimilation and, necessarily, identity. Despite his departure from Pound being so well established, Zukofsky does not abscond from the poetic as Stein does. The "theme of offense," in terms of the opposite to defense, can be found in "Poem Beginning 'The'", which rather neatly marries the terrifically inviting vulnerability of defensiveness in Stein and the commanding aggression of certainty in Pound and Williams. Accordingly, Perelman observes how "Zukofsky's writing is not separable from Zukofsky writing, labouring over words in isolation, producing meaning but not quite embodying it".[229] In other words, Zukofsky performs, according to Perelman, an act of aggressive presence in the text while creating negative spaces as a method of haunting akin to the "other woman" in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley".

There is a figurative, literal, and first-person presence in the first lines of "Poem beginning 'The'", preemptively numbered, ready for the canon, for recognition, for dissection, and to laugh at the pomposity of such expectations:

1      The
2      Voice of Jesus I. Rush singing

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[229] Perelman, 175.

Of course a "theme of offense" could seem like a rather spurious meditation on a poem but it is meant in terms of it being combative, confrontational, aggressive and even tactical. A "theme of offense" means all of these things, however the nature of the "theme" itself means it is not representative of the whole poem. It runs through the poem as the poem itself does its best to negotiate the theme of offense. To clarify, this "theme of offense" takes root in inscrutability and particularly in Zukofsky's poetic reticence. The first line of the poem consists of one word, opaque in its huge potential: "The." Followed by something like white noise, the blank space can be read as something missing, omitted, or even as a deliberate un-anchoring of the poem from readerly expectations, which that has the effect of turning the gaze of the poem back on the reader in his/her bewilderment.

How can the first line of a poem say nothing? Does the word "The" say nothing? Certainly not. It is the beginning of expectation in reading that in this instance is unsatisfied, there is no "Jane" no "ball" no "red". There is no content, only "The" poem, such that the poem levels a gaze at the reader.[231] This is not to suggest that the poem reads the reader but it defies the most minimal of expectations as seemingly unreasonable, even offensive. However, it also offers an invitation since it is, after all, a poem and by its very nature is not out to get us, instead we are out to get it. This is how I perceive the theme of offence to be in operation in the poem's resistance and reticence as Zukofsky writes a remarkably loud silence. In doing so, it becomes immediately apparent that there is no silence in a poem because the act of reading it is an act of filling it in by knowing it or its meaning. This highlights another point of any discussion of Kindness. Zukofsky's defensiveness, which is aggressive but not accusatory, levels a suggestion at the reader regarding how s/he is reading since the poem is written to demand questions of its reading. This is initially rather unnerving, however this quality speaks to the idea of the ability of a poem to make a reader perceive "behaviour". "Poem Beginning 'The'" seems to openly examine this possibility of potential communication through a method that inhibits comprehension specifically to raise questions about comprehension itself. In a reparative reading of Kindness this is a moment of sharing since the frustration of the writer is similarly the

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[230] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.
[231] Woods observes that in Zukofsky's work "Silence has a rhythm or quantity of measure" Woods, 179.

frustration of the reader and the catalyst for both is the improbable impossibility of knowing through comprehension, that is, to follow Woods's model, the tools of expression are inhospitable to the expressions that the poem seeks to make.

The negotiation of the "theme of offense" that is, negotiating the "theme of offense" and performing an offensive, is central to this reading of "Poem beginning 'The'". The posture Bernstein identifies as "anti-assimilationist" is the starting point for this reading, which will focus on the development and means of the poem itself rather than Zukofsky's conception of the self. In remembering the tactical we might also perhaps remember the adage that the best defense is a good offense. Conviction and anxiety about the self—as poet and poem—perform struggles that are inherent in the poem. This perspective is not particularly new but in the context of reparative readings, Kindness can be drawn from this condition. Defense is the method of abstraction and contortion Zukofsky employs and that is where we might locate Kindness. What we begin to see, then, is a theme defined as an aggressive negotiation of itself. He, the poet, wrestles with assimilation, whether literary or otherwise. As this struggle plays out, Zukofsky conflates the certainty and confidence of the "Voice" as an accepted operation of the "truth" within the poem with the resistance of the vulnerable or the resistance vulnerability engenders, an operation of both reticence and defensive obfuscation and the necessarily new, consequently revealing a further source of Kindness in reading. "Poem beginning 'The'" demonstrates a planning of trajectories that seems at times to verge on the mathematical. There is an aggression, or a compulsion toward aggression, in "Poem beginning 'The'" that finds its metre in contrasting flecks of sorrow with devious mirth. There is no spirit of triumph, despite the occasional evidence of the urge to conquer, which would undermine the essential vulnerability of this aggressively impervious poem. It is important, however, to remember that the impervious nature of the piece provides a means to read it as an independent unit, with the hope of discovering how Kindness inhabits a poem that doesn't want to be read, one which that scorns the reader yet seems to have the urge to communicate.

## Further developments on "behaviour" and form: culture and substance in the first movement of "Poem Beginning 'The'"

As a means of introducing the conflation of defensiveness and offence while acknowledging the graph-like idea of trajectories, it is worth considering a short poem by Zukofsky that evinces stylistics which echo the first three poets discussed:

> Glad they were there
> Falling away
> Flying not to
> Lose sight of it
> Not going far
> In angles out
> Of ovals of
> Dances filled up
> The field the green
> With light above
> With the one hand
> In the other.[232]

The revolving centrepiece of this poem, "Of ovals of", is a marvelous moment of physicality with the image itself combining in synthesis. The narrowness of "Of" suggests the corners of or ends of an elongated oval and perversely "oval" suggests the length of an oval's flanks, as the syncopated rhythm the phrase produces seeming to account for the irregular regularity of the oval's roll. The moment possesses both "singularity" and "vibrancy". Significantly, the phrase operates in a central moment of expansion, inhabiting a readerly space of minute cog-like turning and the central revolution of the machinations of the poem itself. The poem seems to draw near to this central revolution in syntax as well before spinning out away from it. "Flying" and "Falling" account for some type of draw, a reel perhaps, and the presence of "light above" and hand holding suggest departure. "Of ovals of" operates as a twisting central peak to the poem that becomes almost as tangible in this poem as fabric in a twist. Materiality itself, or substance, is not necessarily the modernist essential "thing" itself but the poem can be considered a production of a substance or a material. This notion of substance is also an appropriate avenue to consider the figurative idea of substance or material, since fabric suggests weaving for a larger

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[232] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 93.

purpose, which in fact chimes well with Zukofsky's project in "Poem Beginning 'The'".

By producing a substance that is new and woven, there is an implicit questioning if not repudiation of "truth" as it exists in the work of Pound or Williams as a confidence in certainty incarnate because Zukofsky's gesture or project here is to *make* proof in poetics rather than just demonstrate truth with poetics. This rather abstract proposition relies on the idea that Zukofsky uses the certainty inherent in modernist aesthetics and the verbal yet hermetic quality I have discussed in Stein, and in this process develops not a literal substance but rather a materiality that expresses the disparity between truth, feelings and language. One might very reasonably consider this to be difficulty but in addition to this I would argue that we can find Kindness in this precise anxiety, which indeed propels the primacy of "sincerity and objectification" for the Objectivists on the whole. The above poem has the sparse identity of Stein and the boldness of gesture and willingness to subjectivity and truth, or "sincerity and objectification" that demonstrates the push/pull moment of Zukofsky's radiant defensive offence.

As a result of this, it is essential to read, define and distinguish the operations of self-defense and, therefore, "offence" in "Poem Beginning 'The'", the "First Movement" of which is as, if not more so, densely laced with allusions and references as any section of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". It is even laden *with* "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", lines 15 and 18 being the most explicitly so: "15      The broken Earth-face, the age demands an image of its life and contacts," and "18    And   why,   Lord, this time, is it Mauberley's Luini in porcelain, why is it Chelifer".[233] In fact, the movement is almost all allusion and reference, beginning with Chaucer and ending before the addendum "Let me be/Not by art have we lived" with a rather hilarious hysterical "Dalloway! Dalloway—". The edge here is obtained by the obsessive presence of reference, specifically to specific texts *"out of olde bokes, in good feith"*.[234] The "good feith" of the epigraph from Chaucer expands upon the apparent character of the proximity and distance that is inherent in the evidenced book study in this first movement. It is possible to consider this as another instance of the poem producing a substance, a materiality of material, as the text seems *made* out of other

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[233] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.
[234] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.

texts.[235] A material anxiety about the disparity between truth, feeling and language develops in a patchwork of other literary texts. The "good feith" that these "olde bokes" books represent invokes the closeness with which the reader trusts the text and perhaps soothes some of the hot temper implicit in this first movement. That is, the relationship the text has with other texts is tense and reflective of the fraught readerly experience, as the texts seem to talk about themselves and form the poem. An anxiety about presence is consequently engendered as "good feith" seems to set up the dynamics of a relationship that supports alienation yet offers a restorative version of certain literary knowledge.

Reference in Pound's and Zukofsky's texts present moments that we have discussed as edges. Edges in terms of Williams present colour and contrast, since his use of them suggests confinement that is both secure and threatening. This anxiety, disparity and difference is one significant commonality between Zukofsky and Williams. Zukofsky's use of referential edges, however, differs from this, but it is not like the poetic mirage of Penelope and Flaubert smudging into one that we witnessed in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", although smudging does come into it. The references are, in one respect, the subject of the address because they are questioned and pulled at, in a series of asides. Zukofsky challenges the texts he engages while also challenging the reader's knowledge and comprehension, simultaneously exposing the very obfuscation presented, ensuring that the "theme of offense" emerges as inscrutability at first glance. That is, the references seem to serve the purpose of exposing the inherent narrowness of knowledge and the gluttony of allusion in a basically defensive or "paranoid" position. In this sense, they, the references, are reduced to words as the context affords them no privilege. This movement is specifically about writing and the improbability of reading it:

26      And why if the waste land has been explored,
                travelled over, circumscribed,
27      Are there only wrathless skeletons exhumed
                new planted in its sacred wood[236]

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[235] As Sandra Kumamoto Stanley observes: "To read Louis Zukofsky's poetry is to encounter Zukofsky reading". Sandra Kumamoto Stanley, *Louis Zukofsky and the Transformation of a Modern American Poetics* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1994), 11.
[236] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 10.

"The Waste Land" here is subsumed by the new poem Zukofsky writes, not the Poundian smudge but the extrication of words from their contexts and the submersion of these words in this new poetic context. These moments present a blurred collage, prompting the question: Can "the waste land" *mean* anything other than *The Waste Land*? And if it can't, how can we resolve reading meaning without a layered version of "universal truth" indeed an "objective correlative" which inhibits human understanding? Writing, therefore, is rendered deeply self-conscious as something "travelled over" and by reading it, becomes "circumscribed".

I would argue that like Pound's attacks on American provincialism, Zukofsky is confronting a legacy in order to perpetuate the work of his own poetic. However, unlike Pound, whose arsenal comes from Europe and the past, Zukofsky is invoking the contemporary modernist oeuvre since almost all of the texts present are significant modernist texts. More specifically, the action of the poem upon the references is not interpretation but interrogation by means of presentation, which includes appropriation, foregrounding the act of writing as opposed to the reading. Despite this, context is a loaded concept in Zukofsky's poetics. In his essay "An Objective", he discusses the nature of a/the poem:

> A poem. Also the materials which are outside (?) the veins and capillaries—The context—The context necessarily dealing with a world outside of it—The desire for what is objectively perfect, inextricably the direction of historic and contemporary particulars—A desire to place everything—everything aptly, perfectly, belonging within, one with, a context—
> A poem. The context based on a world—Idle metaphor—a lime base—a fibre—not merely a charged vacuum tube—an aerie of personation—The desire for an inclusiveness—The desire for an inclusive object.[237]

"Context" here seems to mean assimilation, questioning whether "those materials which are outside" the texts are those which Zukofsky adorns his first movement with. Is it possible that this frustration of context is an exercise in context itself? Accordingly, Perelman suggests that "beyond the irony, Zukofsky's extensive appropriation of his immediate predecessors seems an aggressive gesture aiming to place himself in the 'olde boy' network".[238] This is a reasonably straightforward reading, yet the ambition Perelman suggests does not account for the significance of

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[237] Zukofsky, *Prepositions+,* 15.
[238] Perelman, 175.

the urge for inclusivity in the text itself. Of course, there is a deliberate gaucheness to this notion of context in the first movement, but this simply describes the impossibility and the frustration of context as a means to enhance comprehension. This frustration speaks to ideas of cultural assimilation within certain hegemonies depending on demonstrations of particular understandings, and knowledge which in their ideal form, as an assimilated thinker engages with the intellectual/cultural hegemony, should not or need not be demonstrated. The first movement provides an active type of writing that seeks to demonstrate knowledge and simultaneously undermine it, as evincing a pressure to know and the embarrassment of showing-off. This section performs a frustration of comprehension, declaration and implication. Poetic offence and defensiveness abound and ultimately ring with vulnerability as it they evoke an agenda that demands a win. It is a self-conscious project of self-consciousness, "Oedipus-faced wrecks".

Perhaps the most obviously apparent instance of this self-defense is initially the posture of the "First Movement":

16      Lord, lord, not that we pray, are sure of
          the question,
17      But why are our finest always dead?[239]

Despite occurring a quarter of the way though the movement, these lines offer what is likely the most complete instance of tone that neglects, mocks and moves the poem and the reader, making them inward looking and self-defeating. In "not that we pray", how can a reader understand "we"? There is no gesture toward connection thus far in the poem. Indeed, there is a fairly vicious betrayal at the beginning of the poem that suggests or seems to seriously warn the reader away from investment. More than impish, it delights in its delicate thuggery by being a confusing and bizarrely hurtful pun:

4      A boy's best friend is his mother,
5      It's your mother all the time.
6      Residue of Oedipus-faced wrecks[240]

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[239] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.
[240] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.

The reader's (Freudian) ego is bruised as the tawdriness of "Oedipus-faced wrecks" seems so brutally cheap, which is of course formed by and anchored to its very specific irreverence. The subversion too is paradoxically dramatic, since rather than Rex we have "wrecks", rather than the king we have failures. Woods observes that "Puns are the principle mode in which Zukofsky can really achieve his musical language […] [to] form of language where there is an erasing without erasing; a memory loss with retention; a keeping of difference within the similar; a total multiplicity of languages, a proliferation of tongues, voices, and cultures in an economy (two or more for the price of one!) of language".[241] Woods's *Poetics of the Limit* is for the most part about "A", however, his observations are illuminating when considering "Poem Beginning 'The'", which demonstrates how many of Zukofsky's later strategies are available in the earlier poem. "Oedipus faced wrecks" exemplifies a moment of "erasing without erasing" and of "memory loss with retention". It is also worth noting that "a keeping of difference within the similar" is analogous to the modes of "Singularity" that Attridge has outlined. Indeed, Woods's comments on the affectivity of the pun in Zukofsky also resonate with the apprehension of "vital materiality" as affective assemblages in Bennett. But to return to the poem, Oedipus was wrecked and certainly his relationship with his mother wrecked things. However, this is not actually Oedipus but only a figure who is "Oedipus-faced", yet not even this but the "Residue" of these failures resemble the failed king. The pun as a manner in syntax and a response to expectation is an affront, a bitter sarcasm that usurps the reader and tricks him/her momentarily with a sleight of hand.[242]

This function also seeps into the grotesque aspect of the passage. "Residue", one could argue, is the very nature of a pun as it implies the marks left behind by something that is now absent. Oedipus Rex is Oedipus wrecks, so the pun itself enacts a form of wreckage. In a firm departure from Pound's passionate and learned allegory, Zukofsky takes the material, the substance of allegory, and smears it into a

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[241] Woods, 205.
[242] Woods also makes a reading of Zukofsky's line from "A"—6. "Practicing word sleight". Woods argues that "sleight" itself is a "useful gloss for reading "A". It suggests cunning, artifice, wiliness, a craftiness with words; indeed, it means "strategy" itself. It also implies skill, cleverness, dexterity in the making and doing of something, a precise art or trick in handling tools or other implements; also nimbleness, adroitness, smartness of mind, a feat of jugglery, a piece of nimble juggling or conjouring. "Practicing word sleight" is a very apt description of the textual process of "A": Zukofsky emerges as a manipulator of words or, perhaps alternatively, the words manipulating themselves. "Practicing word sleight" is the alternative writing focus to presenting differences and thereby presenting integrity." Woods, 64.

pun. In doing so he flusters and irritates the reader, pushing him/her to a further distance by corrupting the incorruptible allegory. The moment of cultural sharing that educated people can know and share is demonstrably bastardized into a pun. But this is not just any allegory, it is Oedipus who killed his father and slept with his mother. While a modernist artist is obliged to kill his father, according to Harold Bloom, in this instance it is the pressure of the mother that "wrecks" Oedipus. There is no grand patricide, just the over bearing presence of the mother. The prevalence of Freudian theory is taken for granted but the Oedipus-faced figure leaves a residue. Subsequently the figure that redeems returns, the one with the perfect mother and significantly immortal father, the "thin Christ" sending his mother away and certainly not sleeping with her.

Despite the pagan duality positioning Oedipus and Christ as mirrors of each other, the poem begins with the conflation of Christ and the figure I:

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1   The
2   Voice of Jesus I. Rush singing
3                    in the wilderness[243]
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This conflation appears in the "voice", that is, in the figure "I" since the figure represented by "I" is the "Voice of Jesus", meaning Jesus inhabits "I" and "I" the figure presents the embodiment of the disembodied "Voice of Jesus". The conflation of Christ and the "I" figure becomes apparent, the physical and the potentially immortal even though the voice is necessarily corporeal, at least bodily. Importantly, there is a crucial distinction or a separation between the figure as the body and the voice. This distinction is reinforced in the following phrase "Rush singing". Perhaps the rushes could be read as biblical bull-rushes in the breeze, hiding the baby Moses. The presence of boyhood is key and rather than Moses the infant, the boyhood is figurative, expressed through one vital action and evincing a physical leap with the "Rush singing" into a marked and long gap in line 3. The boyness is present in the "Rush" and the "singing", it is audible but obscure so what is being sung is not immediately apparent. Remembering the conflation Christ and "I", this conflation is expressed in the singing. Is the voice the spirit perhaps, or the Son, the sacrificed, or the boyhood of the mythological? This in turn echoes the poem's negotiation of its

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[243] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.

literary forebears. Consequently, the question must be: what occupies the gap in the line itself or, indeed, what makes it essential? Is it possible that potential is demonstrably peaking and the gap in the line presents this potential, i.e. the improbability of knowing and the potential understanding that this affords? Is the reader "in the wilderness" as s/he attempts to resolve the deeply perplexing series of images and conflations. These familiarities circumscribe some kind of problem with physicality, even as the written word, and knowledge, highlighting the gap between the word spoken and its meaning. This compromised figure of conflation fastens itself to another familiarity, that of Christ which colours reading irrevocably and worries the poem itself from the outset.

Vulnerability, in this sense, is expressed in profound and clear cultural terms, as the allegory of the wilderness refers more specifically to the Biblical wilderness. The wilderness is where Christ is tested by the Devil. It is also where Adam and Eve are cast out from Eden into and is where the Hebrews, led by Moses, wander for forty years. In short, the wilderness is exile. The wilderness is where God seems to withdraw despite His enduring omniscience, where humanity is left to experience trials and is punished in order to survive. "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" also begins, in exile, "In a half savage country, out of date; / Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn".[244] Pound's wilderness represents his own perceptions of the American cultural landscape as barren and uncivilized, yet there remains the artistic resolution to depend upon the self, to create and to make, despite what the poem regards as its terribly second-rate, or rather substantial yet nascent and rather less refined, materials. Perhaps Zukofsky responds to this imperative in this nominal cultural wilderness. The notion of the wilderness functions spatially, culturally and ideologically in various ways in this poem.[245] The wilderness as a Godless space functions here as representative of human vulnerability itself, conveying the isolation and loneliness where one must depend upon oneself for survival, thus evincing fear. This notion of

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[244] Pound, *Personæ*, 185.
[245] Jennison discusses what she considers to be the Objectivist project of mediation through Trotsky's uneven developments and the Marxists' notions of commodity form in an increasingly left-wing artistic movement in the advent of the Depression. Kindness as a reparative method seeks to invite readings that can raise awareness and engage "poethically" with the "behaviour" of the poem. The major risk of this method is that the thesis might end up "anemically dehistoricized and formalist", as Woods warns (Woods, 101.). However, as I have demonstrated with my work on Bennett, Sedgwick and Attridge, there is space and justification for reparative readings, not least because the current scholarship on Zukofsky and Oppen, for example, focuses on ethical grammars of aesthetic construction and responsibility.

exile also reflects the idea of Kindness as a "grammar of reading" in exile. Significantly, it also evinces a temporary state, since the wilderness will be left at some stage, or more likely, adjusted to, thus losing its status as wilderness. Like youth itself, the wilderness suggests temporary yet profound vulnerability. Again, this notion resonates with the idea of reading in exile, as Kindness suggests or invites the notion that through its reparative "grammar of reading" the exiled reader can find comfort in or negotiate a departure from exile.

The question then is, what does this mother anchor mean when "in the wilderness/A boy's best friend is his mother".[246] Have Biblical notions of humanity turned to complacent adages that chime with such slogans as "A Boy's best friend..."? Not to mention of course that man's best friend is typically a dog, (especially if that man is a shepherd.) This chicane of expectation is precisely the type of action that draws the reader in, before subverting his/her comfort. The return of or reliance on the mother, a figure of dependability, is further examined in the "Fifth Movement: Autobiography". Woods discusses Zukofsky's "mother" in the poem as being in response to "Eliot's patriarchal Tradition and reestablishes a different line of genesis, both for the subject and for writing as cultural production (…) Zukofsky's text challenges Eliot's marginalization and suppression of the Jew and inscribes Semitic cultural heritage, with its greater deference to the Mother and matrilineal descent".[247] The mother presents an alternative culture of memory rather than scholarly or esoteric knowledge, the antithesis of the assimilation problems of a context of demonstrable book-based knowledge, comfort in exile. In this sense, we can see Zukofsky writing against the first generation of Eliot's tradition as the "mother" presents the "other", not as the figure herself but as an alternative to "Tradition". This emblem of Zukofsky's modernist "alterity" is an example of "vibrant singularity", and reading or writing in exile.

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[246] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.
[247] Woods, 29-30.

## Conflated figures and poetic "behaviour"

Confusion, loss and shock register as the reader goes from the perfect son "Jesus 'I'"
to the juvenile castration of idioms such as "a boy's best friend is his mother". The
poem of course starts a possibly engendered scream or a gasp at its very audacity:

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1   The
2   Voice of Jesus I. Rush singing
3                      in the wilderness248
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The conflation here achieves the action of the boy-figure rushing and singing, about
to be crushed to a residue by the sentiment that ends with a final and weighty full stop
"It's your mother all the time." Perhaps it is possible to argue that indignation at the
pun in line 6 may be the moment the reader is able to feel the outrage of the absurdity
of youth, the son, the mother, the rush and the crush of the self. Therefore, the
humiliation of the pun and the ineffectiveness of the chuckle serve as testament to the
warning issued from the disembodied, un-anchored voice that narrates, describes and
declares that the poem, in line "5      It's your mother all the time".249

Christ apparently develops from a boy to an adolescent throughout the first
part of the poem, as the figure of Christ reappears in line 9 "[…] sending her out of
the temple". The vivid presence of the mother figure in the preceding lines directs the
reader to assume that Christ is sending his mother, Mary, out of the temple, thus
enacting yet another conflation. The moment described resonates with two biblical
stories, in particular Luke 2:41-52 and Matthew 21. Both of these narratives locate
Christ in the Temple. In Luke he is 12 years old and has apparently absconded from
his parents in order to attend the Temple. He is unapologetic when his parents find
him, asking them why they looked for him when surely they should know he would
be in his Father's house. However, in Matthew when Christ arrives in Jerusalem to
find the Temple being used for trade and money lending, he is furious and casts those
in the temple out. So here is the conflation of Christ and his mother in the Temple and
Christ sending people out of the temple, events that almost span Christ's life and
delineate a certain clarity of purpose and a diversity of method. One evinces a calm
precociousness and the other indignation. At this point, it is important to remember

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[248] Zukofsky, ANEW, 9.
[249] Zukofsky, ANEW, 9.

the primary conflation of "Jesus 'I'". The voice with which Jesus speaks to his mother in the temple and with which he sends the merchants out of the temple is once again present in the text yet, significantly, these voices are neither heard nor voiced in or by the text itself. Developing Woods's reading of the mother figure here adds another layer to the reading. If Christ is sending his mother out of the temple, that is, his Father's house, then we might read a further dramatic moment of cultural collision or negotiation. As Woods demonstrates, the mother can be seen as representing not only the Semitic matriarchal tradition but also a counter to the patriarchal, Christian tradition of Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Therefore, when she is sent out of the Temple, there is a painful moment of literary drama. The Semitic figure of alterity – the mother – is effectively banished from the patriarchal Tradition, a conflict that is explored and performed throughout the poem's struggle.

The presence of Freud in "Poem Beginning 'The'" is clear, making it relevant to address Sedgwick's use of Klein as she develops the notion of the "position" because we can then also consider the idea of the posture in the poem as a way of referring to the conditions of "vibrant singularity" I have identified using Attridge's and Bennett's theories. Sedgwick uses Hinschelwood's *Dictionary of Kleinian Thought* to describe her use of Klein's notion of "position":

> The term 'position' describes the characteristic posture that the ego takes up with respect to its objects. …[Klein] wanted to convey, with the idea of position, a much more flexible to-and-fro process between one and the other than is normally meant by regression to fixation points in the developmental phases.[250]

When considering the thing-ness of the poem in a readerly context, one way to think about a "behavioural" reading would be to consider the "characteristic posture that the ego takes up". The ego, in this case, is found in the voice of the poem or the poem itself but is always distinct from one's reading of it. In this sense, the relationship of the "Poem Beginning 'The'" to the "mother" can be read as a reparative discourse between various "alterities", like the modernist tradition in Eliot's sense and the Semitic cultural lineage that Woods outlines and that Zukofsky places in parataxis to it. This parataxis can be read even in the "Jesus I" conflation. Perhaps another significance of this conflation is the voiceless voice, which struggles with authority

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[250] Sedgwick, 128.

and certainty in itself yet is profoundly significant for revealing the figure it forces and the vulnerability it evinces.

Vulnerability rests almost entirely in this conflation. There seems to be an obscured point of entry for comprehension that Zukofsky employs and shifts, which the reader must simultaneously employ and shift. This point of entry also serves as the lynchpin for the conflation itself, that is, these doubled up noun and verb formulations, i.e. "voice", "I", "rush" and "singing", create a sort of multifaceted duality of images. Like a reflection viewed side-by-side, the parataxis or the Kleinian "to-and fro process" rather than a diptych, still necessarily interrupts and divides itself. But this point of convergence between the "voice" and the "I" articulates a gap, the unsayable. Whether or not this gap itself articulates real silence raises another problem but there is a crucial difference between the verbal and the non-verbal. I propose that both work here through these mirrored conflations to discuss meaning both figuratively and in terms of a figure.

The double noun "Jesus I" is uninterrupted, perhaps raising verbal expectations. For example, the hymnal conclusion that would suggest this is meant to address Jesus himself, as in "Oh Jesus I have promised". Of course it does not since it ceases and remains a disturbing departure from the familiar, making it a strange, stopped-short utterance and, perhaps most significantly, the bizarre enjambment of "Jesus I" recalls Pound's "His true Persephone was Flaubert".[251] This is a poetic gesture of the figurative enjambment of figures and is, therefore, a moment of distinction and distinct vulnerability in Zukofsky. Whereas Pound specifically frames such a moment of enjambment, Zukofsky produces the writerly moment of enjambment itself as the very core of the self. But who is this I? The reader or the poet? Whose voice is it? The enjambment is reinforced by the subsequent doubling of verbs that necessarily appear next to each other in a destabilizing continuation of the mirroring of nouns. "Rush" may also be a noun, which further complicates the matter. If the "Rush" is indeed a noun like a reed, then it serves well to remember that it was Moses who was protected by the Bull Rushes. Then perhaps the Rush singing or the singing rush is singing that song of the precarious childhood of Moses. "Rush singing," if read as a pair of verbs seems innocuous enough. However, I would argue that this rather sweet and fresh action is doubled itself and renders the previous

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[251] Pound, *Personæ*, 185.

doubling plausible. And the meaning of the line is cast back to its beginning, "Voice". That is, the singing returns to the voiceless conflated figure to be the voice of Jesus from the mouth of the figure "I" rushing "singing" and so on, thus articulating a tangled confusion. The various methods, not of duplicity or the will to bewilder, emerge, doubling and recollecting within the line, in pairings and enjambments.

The vulnerability I want to examine in Zukofsky is evident in this density. It is flails open and produces numerous murky boulevards of enquiry or investigation, and in this sense is totally unlike Stein's hermetic gems. Yet there is vulnerability, all the same, because a sense of defensiveness is present and indeed a defense of the present, in the evident weight of Zukofsky's artillery. The fascinating disturbance from which Pound or Williams are poetically exempt, that is, doubt of the self, the poem or the reader, is key to understanding the nightmarish qualities of "Poem Beginning 'The'". The doubt here, works to resolve or reread the keys that permitted Pound and Williams to make their declarations of universality and the devastating "universal truth". Through Kindness we can find Zukofsky's negotiations with universal doubt. However, it is necessary here to address his negotiations to identify how the reader might find some form of Kindness in this "behaviourally" aggressive and defensive poem, which pulls the reader in as it pushes him/her away as evidence of "characteristic posture".[252] The sense of the conflated and thus simultaneously compromised and strengthened figure "Jesus I" articulates the sense of aggressive doubt I want to discuss here.


## The "other" figure in "Poem Beginning 'The'"

The figure haunting "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", the "other woman", has a resonance within "Poem Beginning 'The'". The figure in this poem runs like a vein, enacting the defensive postures and yet exposing vulnerabilities that are hidden in plain sight. The adolescent figure, the solipsism of the word "The", the Christ and the voices, the reader, and the translator, all thread through the poem, peaking in parts even in the translated section of the fifth movement where there is a "barefoot shepherd boy".[253] Referring to the discussion of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" in which the figure is

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[252] Sedgwick, 128.
[253] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 16.

female or "other", she represents at different points both horror and alienation. She is an "old bitch gone in the teeth".[254] She is also the image in the anachronistic "Luini" in porcelain. She haunts the poem and achieves a subtle dominance through her myriad of visages, which all hint towards a universality that cannot, within the context of the poem, be denied or negotiated but which can, according to Pound's poetics, be declared. This figure, as she is subsumed within the text of the poem, functions to demonstrate or display a certain method of understanding that is presented as truth, as discussed in terms of Huyssen's work. She features as a character within a totality which the poem presents, a totality which is dependent on a universally accepted concept of things or truth that unfortunately precludes the subjectivity of experience. The haunting of "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" goes some lengths to suggest that its body, i.e. the body of the text itself, is *real,* that it can experience the "other", which in turn reinforces the poem's self-assumed, solid reality.

However, Zukofsky's figure is bold and the surge it makes through the poem evinces something like a haunting or maybe a hunting, but this haunting does not demonstrate the function of the "other" in the poem as it does in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". Crucially, it is the reflected *self* of the poem. Woods is writing on "A"-9 when he observes that "Poetry for Zukofsky becomes a mode of aesthetic self-reflection that gets under the skin of mystifications and reveals 'truths' through its own exigencies of precision".[255] In this reflection, the figure of the boy in "Poem Beginning 'The'", there is worry and anxiety but a trend toward the heroism of boyhood persists. Significantly, the figure, unlike the "other woman" in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", does not represent a universal concept of truth although it does provoke a sense of the universal struggle for, the right, or insistence upon a voice as a method of understanding. Rather than observing an apparently objective irrefutable reality and suffusing that with presentationally dazzlingly, difficult poetry like Pound does, Zukofsky figures the figure, "The waters are shaking the moon".[256] Yet Zukofsky has the certainty that an "other" experience is in fact subject for modernist expression and achieves a Poundian assault on the method of presentation. But, Zukofsky does so with more difficulty and less didactic certainty about the nature of the ghost that haunts. Nevertheless, the poem presents a certain tentative yet

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[254] Pound, *Personæ*, 188.
[255] Woods, 107.
[256] Lawrence, "Poetry of the Present", 76.

determined knowledge of the figure, of David perhaps, a rather different Jewish boy to Christ. Perelman argues that "Zukofsky's writing is not separable from Zukofsky writing, labouring over words in isolation, producing meaning but not quite embodying it".[257] Although this is the second use of Perelman's observation in the thesis in this context it raises some fascinating questions about voice. And this figure/voice production is the poem as a unit that is self-conscious and separate from the meaning it "produces". The certainty comes from the production of the meaning, that is, the work and the self, and acknowledges not certainty as definitive notions of the/its meaning, thereby questioning the nature of meaning itself.

The figure is that which operates, experiences and represents within the poem itself, thus allowing the poem a much more fluid and reciprocal method of meaning and therefore "behaving". The reoccurrence of the image of the boy or young man, whether explicit or implied, echoes the spectral quality of Pound's "other woman" in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". However, the figure in "Poem Beginning 'The'" has an obviously different performative function or a different "behaviour", if we are to discuss the poem as a whole. There is even less onus on finding out what it, the poem itself, means, because the problem of what it means is not solved simply by translation or deciphering.  The text in parts is literally already a translation but as Zukofsky performs the act of translation in the poem itself, that gesture then invites the reader to stop translating and read the text, to stop investing in and investigating the obviously complex series of allusions and references that, in part, make up the text. An encyclopedia is very useful when reading "Poem Beginning 'The'" but it should not be essential. If it, the poem, translates do not translate it. It is a poem that exists deliberately and very closely to its own surface, it performs or makes a sort of relief image with texture and real depth but all of the one substance.[258] It should not be read with a view to understanding meaning, which is in part the whip that cracks over "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" as it is haunted by the ghost waiting for discovery. The ghost here is a figure, alive and well and standing "rushing singing" from the beginning.

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[257] Perelman, 173.
[258] Woods argues that "Zukofsky's quotations are not attempts to recuperate the past; unlike repetition, recuperation works with the sense of an unproblematical recovery of an authentic past. Rather, the quotations in "A" work like an "interpretative translation," bearing close resemblance to Fredric Jameson's characterization of modernism, which seeks to "reappropriate an alienated universe by transforming it into personal styles and private languages". Woods, 193.

Also, it is important to note the obvious difference in the figures. In "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", on the one hand, we find the archetypal "other", the dangerous female who is mysterious and repeatedly quantified yet made real in various forms of contemptuous fallacy and horror. In "Poem Beginning 'The'", on the other hand, there is the ambition of the boy figure, the agony of whom exists between the hopeful confidence of adulthood and the hopeful unawareness and confidence of childhood. This is a figure that functions to give voice to the internalized, external pressure of assimilation. No wonder then that Christ, an ultimate well-meaning "alien", is a character that embodies this within the context of Zukofsky's observations. Vulnerability and self-awareness combine in this figure, who is not just a boy but a man yet still inhabiting that liminal space or experience between childhood and adulthood, between knowledge and understanding, and demonstrating a sort of nostalgia for that hyper-moment of the combination of un-self-aware, joyful certainty and conviction of the self, the means to determination. The "mother" of the poem, as the poem seems to have a mother, seems to be part of its posture but in the context of a reparative reading, it does not so much haunt the text but structures and informs the text as a reflection of the self and the poem. It is an emblem of memory, a pre-learned form of knowledge, understanding and frustration. This is a moment that certainly expresses Kindness in a symphonic idea of the instant before we realize that it is impossible to know meaning. However, this is not to say that I am interpreting this as Zukofsky's point but to suggest a discussion that acknowledges this figure as a character within "Poem Beginning 'The'", a character that develops and helps carve that relief surface, seems to be nudging Kindness into interacting with uncertainty as a key point in the development of this idea of Kindness.

This comparison of figures is not definitive but is rather a means to explore the complications that uncertainty and vulnerability introduce to Pound's modernist poetics. That is, to understand how Zukofsky can produce a poetics in "Poem Beginning 'The'" that draws on the compelling and perhaps essential quality of invulnerability in Pound and Williams, yet also introduce a more humane form of declaration that is still embattled in rigorous reference, yet induces a more accessible alienation and is significant to a reading of Kindness as it withdraws from a rhetoric of certainty and explores conflict and alterity within the experience of the poem. The "behaviour" of the poem achieves greater definition and articulation through the ambiguities of the first and second generation modernist struggle, a struggle that is

normally discussed and characterized today as an ethico-political negotiation. While I do not disagree with this assessment, Kindness is the focus of this thesis. As such, the method of the reading here is creative, close, intuitive and suggestive; the ethical and the aesthetic remain crucial themes throughout because Kindness as a "grammar of reading" must bring these two things into the orbit of one another.

The development of the figure from boyhood to adolescence responds throughout the poem to an idea about the rejection of the mother. Consider the framed phrase in line "9        Vide the legend of thin Christ sending her out of the temple,—".[259] Zukofsky's use of the word "Vide" directs the reader to look at the legend suggesting an image that is definite, a tableau. The inclusion of the word "thin" for Christ suggests a particular image that might present a valid resonance with the text of the poem. Within the reparative structures of Kindness, resonance is valuable as it evinces the individual ideoculture and permits readings that engage beyond the rigours necessitated by reading the poem as artifact. In this sense a reading of Kindness expands a notion of naïveté that proceeds with the idea that not only is no interpretation naïve but also that, in this sense, interpretations, or readings may well be informed or enriched by influences and resonances beyond the socio-economic cluster that surrounds any given text. With this in mind, it is possible to consider the resonances that occur in a small microcosm of Victorian art-criticism as a means to inflect the reading of "Poem Beginning 'The'" which of course addresses both the figure and the boyhood of Christ and anti-Semitism. It is important to note however, that this is a readerly exercise and not one that is meant to shed contextual light on the poem. It is a moment of contrast that hinges in language and expression and delights in resonance and "vibrant singularity", it appears here as reading that echoes Bennett's thoughts before the storm drain in Baltimore.

*Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849-1850) by John Everett Millais is a painting that began the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood's dramatic introduction into the British artistic establishment of the 19th Century. I mention it here because the painting like "Poem Beginning 'The'", seems to "*Vide* (my italics) the legend of thin Christ". Part of the resonance that the image has with the poem is to be found in the outrage that it provoked upon being revealed to the public. The irony being that amid the horror that the critics felt as they perceived that the holy family had been rendered

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[259] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.

grotesque in their poverty was also a sense of affront that Millais had depicted "the youthful Saviour as a red-headed Jew boy".[260]

We can take it from the above quote that what contemporary critics perceived as the visible Jewishness of Christ was deemed outrageous. *The Builder* goes on to decry Millais' depiction of Mary as "a sore-heeled, ugly, every-day sempstress". Anti-Semitism then feeds into the reading of this painting, as Jewishness is synonymous with badness. Appearing Jewish is worse than being Jewish, given that Christ was of course a Jewish boy. This anti-Semitic concern with appearing Jewish afflicts the critic for *The Builder* and seems in some way to resonate with Zukofsky's negotiation of Jewish identity in the canonical white Christian establishment that runs throughout "Poem Beginning 'The'". Furthermore, the *Builder* quote chimes with the negotiations of expertise and precision of delivery that can be found in both Millais' and Zukofsky's work:

> The theory of the newly-constituted school which includes Mr. Millais (The P.R.B.'s, as they name themselves), if they would but practise in accordance, is excellent, and might be made productive of most important results, for it is not to be denied that "intention," simplicity, and attention to particular form, are considerations not sufficiently felt in our fine-art world. But this painful display of anatomical knowledge, and studious vulgarity of portraying the youthful Saviour as a red-headed Jew boy, and the sublime personage of the virgin a sore-heeled, ugly, every-day sempstress [sic.], will in no way tend to the "consummation so devoutly to be wished." The execution of the objective part of this *misconception* is unexceptionable–witness the grain the extraordinary depiction of shavings. If the artist will adhere to this manner, there are other subjects more fitted to his love of, and great power in, imitation, requiring less refinement and appreciation of the lovable. We would suggest "The Pool of Bethesda".[261]

The verity and "painful display of anatomical knowledge" refers to a thorough and unflinching interrogation of the bodies and, significantly, their evident poverty in the painting, as is evident Millais' painting caused a level of repulsion in its Victorian viewers. We might discern a similarly "painful display of […] knowledge" in Zukofsky's poem with the inscription of numerous and disparate allusions and quotations that seem to draw the focus of the text away from the poem, while making

[260][Anon.], "The Royal Academy Exhibition", *Builder*, 1 Jun. 1850, 255-256 available at: <http://www.engl.duq.edu/servus/PR_Critic/TB1jun50.html> [accessed 26 May 2013].
[261] [Anon.], "The Royal Academy Exhibition", *Builder*, 1 Jun. 1850, 255-256 available at: <http://www.engl.duq.edu/servus/PR_Critic/TB1jun50.html> [accessed 26 May 2013].

the poem itself about learned knowledge evoking a sense of a "painful display of […] knowledge". A key distinction to make here is that this review I would argue resonates with some of the problematics that are encountered in "Poem Beginning 'The'", that is not to say that I suggest the Zukofsky's text is informed by the Millais, only that in a reparative reading, a reader might remark on the textual similarities and have cause to reflect. I do not suggest here that the Victorian ant-Semitism at work in the *Builder* review is instrumentally illuminating to the experience that Zukofsky appears to address in his poem—that of a second generation Jewish immigrant in Manhattan in the 1920s. Just that the aesthetic ethical moments seem to momentarily combine in these three works, review, painting, and poem and the anxieties and ambitions therein might combine to form an assemblage in this "grammar of reading" and provide a reading of "vibrant singularity" that is promoted in Kindness. Nevertheless, there is in "Poem Beginning 'The'", a sense of pain, or a type of panic at least, that rushes to cover and check all the bases in an attempt to reconcile content with rhythm, which makes for a very unsteady and disconcerting read that is almost frantic in its references, inclusion and connection:

> 17      But why are our finest always dead?
> 18      And why, Lord, this time, is it Mauberley's
>                 Luini in porcelain, why is it Chelifer,
> 19      Why is it Lovat who killed Kangaroo,
> 20      Why Stephen Daedalus with the cane of
>                 ash,[262]

An acute anxiety courses throughout the poem. In addition in the same way that *Christ in the House of His Parents* is not so much "real" as "hyper-real" and rather grotesque for it, as references to Lawrence, Joyce, Pound, Eliot and cummings take on the lividity of those wood-shavings on the floor, articulated in this manner in order to distract.[263]

The question remains: what can this reading of resonances mean for Kindness? The reading does not produce clarity, since what the reader can "know" from it is apparently tangled beyond solution, but it remains possible for the text to achieve Kindness, albeit not in the same sense we get from Pound that aims to deliver

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[262] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.
[263] Note here the Luini that may well not be a Luini as discussed in the previous chapter is present in "Poem Beginning 'The'".

a coherent understanding of an undoubtable interpretation of an experience or the haunting vibrancy of Williams's transferable vision of edges, colour and skin. "Poem Beginning 'The'" might be seen to resist Kindness in isolation because it is too defensive or else it is too aggressive. The defensiveness in Zukofsky does not, like in Stein, shore up the edges and render the text impervious to leaks either in or out. It rages in cold silence and lip-curled puns of horror. Perhaps the books and the disorientation mediate this rage. This is a point at which to return to the first quotation mentioned in lines 16 and 17:

16      Lord, Lord, not that we pray, are sure of
                the question,
17      But why are our finest always dead?[264]

The problematic patricide is present again in irreverent terms, as the mock-melodrama of the first section is discussed, which belies serious worry, anxiety, and hope. There are bitter urges to have purchase on and freedom of movement from that which nourishes, raises and, if allowed to, will eventually destroy, that is, the "mother". The litany of "self-exiled men" then follows as a text within the text.[265] Surely, however, as a modernist, Zukofsky necessarily rejects the past poetics of over-delivery associated with Tennyson, Browning, Scott and even Whitman. But these are not the writers that trouble the text. This begs the question: why include the angry, adolescent disclaimer "Lord, lord, not that we pray, are sure of the question"? This question is surely echoed in the reader's wonder about the offending pun. A double-bluff perhaps, since it is not the finest that are dead. These are alive but does the poem really care about them? It seems to reuse the literary characters in both litany and language as a method of extracting and producing a new readerly communication, *Reductio ad absurdum* "—Dalloway! Dalloway—".[266]

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[264] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.
[265] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.
[266] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 11.

# A few notes on sections 2 and 4 of "Poem Beginning 'The'"

DuPlessis asserts observes how "the second movement of Zukofsky's poem is a concerted address to the circumcised penis which is on an outing with Zukofsky; nothing could be more abrasive and confrontive. 'Peter Out' and Zukofsky are walking through the city (an enactment of the 'Prufrock' situation by a randy young Jew".[267] DuPlessis reads an irreverent even bawdy narrative whereas Pound, speaking about the poem, worried that there might "be a drag at the beginning of the second movement".[268] Perhaps there is a masturbatory crescendo to this movement that seems to at once refine and corrupt the distinction between the grotesque, the violent and the irreverent and comical. There is woeful and sardonic sartorial satire in line 75, "Black shirts—black shirts—some power is so funeral".[269] This line obviously refers to Mussolini's or "Il Duce's" fascist militia. Style and death mingle in an uncanny moment of despair and derision but there is a theatrical theme to the movement with C. S. Lewis' "Duchess", the conversations about evening entertainments, and the presence Mussolini and the dead soldiers. The irreverence of youth in the face of the political turmoil of the early twentieth century rendered, in agreement with DuPlessis, a young man out with only his penis for company, experiencing isolation and something similar to depravity. This is implicit in Zukofsky's note to Pound in response to the older poet's criticism, "I was at the time of writing too pleased, however shyly, with Peter Out and too distraught with Lion heart to notice such a drag".[270] Lion heart refers to Zukofsky's friend Richard Chamber who had committed suicide in October of 1926. Masturbation and suicide, therefore, convene to render a lurid theatrical death in this movement of the poem.

The "Fourth Movement: *More 'Renaissance'*" arguably continues to irreverently unpack further accepted pillars of learning. "Askforaclassic, Inc." firstly refers to Columbia University and subsequently to the profitable, business aspect of the university's position. The consumerist element exposes exploitation and necessarily a dumbing down. Zukofsky uses Poe's "To Helen" as the frame for a

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[267] Blau DuPlessis, Rachel, *Genders, Races and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetry, 1908-1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 168.
[268] Ezra Pound, and Louis Zukofsky, and Barry Ahearn, *Pound/Zukofsky, Selected Letters of Ezra Pound and Louis Zukofsky,* ed.by Barry Ahearn (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 3.
[269] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 11.
[270] Pound and Zukofsky and Ahearn, 5.

ridiculous and irreverent "ode" to his "Engprof." (John Erskine). In a rather succulent and gleeful jibe, Zukofsky satirizes the professor and the university experience. It is a characteristically school-boyish method of mocking the teacher and equally a characteristically precocious one. Once again the "poetic" substance provides the substance of the send-up. It cannot escape the reader that the poet used to send-up "learning poetry" is Poe, a poet just an "m" short of a poem. Perhaps this is a reclamation, an example of Zukofsky in retaliation against the corporate aspect of a classical education as he reuses those texts that are the trade of the university to perform proficiency and irreverence and, crucially, to enact larceny. We can read this poem then as a snickering comment written on a wall or scratched on a desk.

Swathes layer upon swathes in "Poem Beginning 'The'" and equally a crude patchwork is stitched onto the skein. Vibrancy of changeability provides momentum and in equal parts renders a reading treacherous, as the poem pivots on the pinhead of the epic. Yet the progression of the poem enacts a continuous response to itself. The fourth movement ends in a vernacular rendering with the now familiar stylistic twist, the noun followed by silence, a gap:

183     Poe,
184     Gentlemen, don'chewknow,
185     But never wrote an epic.[271]

Following this and as though a direct consequence of his education and his precocious irreverence, in the fifth movement Zukofsky, or rather the poem, is in conversation with his or its mother.

## "Speaking about epics, mother": Proximity, Distance, and desire in "behaviour"

The title of "The Fifth Movement: *Autobiography*" immediately poses certain questions that necessarily radiate with the irreverence of the preceding sections. It is possible to read a profound satire into the first line of "Autobiography", although it is rather deadly in the economy that Zukofsky employs in the form of a cold scalpel,

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[271] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 15.

which seems to account for all autobiographies, "186        Speaking    about    epics,

mother".[272] It is both tempting and possible to read this line as a highly emotive

address but who at this point is the reader? Is s/he the mother or the witness to a

conversation? Does the line provide or is it a swift verbal rendition of a discussion on

poetry, with the listener and the mother needing to be informed about poetry,

specifically epics? Are we to take from the line the painful but perhaps inevitable

truth or indeed assumption that the mother knows less? Or alternatively, if we read

that grimace as satire, do we have a confusion and confession of autobiography itself?

The components of the line account for the components of a self-reflective and

absorbed autobiography, but they also perfectly pre-empt the raw satire and bloody

emotion of a novel like Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1963). The line ends with

a comma rather than the finality of a full stop and so there is always more narcissism

because the autobiography is not yet finished. The sheer simultaneity of the

performance of the line is deeply "behavioural" and in its troubling crossfire, we

might consider Kindness.

While considering the "behaviour" of the first line of the Fifth movement, it is

important to remember the role of vulnerability once again. The line seems to

constantly and repetitively account for itself. That is, while the very notion of the

autobiography is satirized and contained by the elements of speech, the epic and the

mother, it is made ridiculous and seems humiliated in its own lack of awareness. This

evinces the action of vulnerability, as it was discussed earlier in the chapter, as an

aggressive form of defense in response to supposed vulnerability. However, this

humiliation, the vulnerability exposed by satire, draws back to the moment the line is

delivered and the vulnerability of the speaker as he addresses his "mother" and the

vulnerability of the "mother" as she is addressed, challenged or condescended to or

indeed pleaded with. The contrivance of the comma before "mother" lends a dramatic

pathos to the line and equally a poetic drama of pathos. There is a deliberate

awkwardness to the corporeal twist that must account for itself as it demonstrates its

own perceived failings.

The poem continues, "187      How     long     ago     is     it     since     you     gathered

mushrooms".[273] The lilt between the first and the second lines of the stanza, which

operate alone and are simultaneously completely inter-dependent, is highly subjective

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[272] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 15.
[273] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 15.

and speculative. This again is the vulnerability that, unlike Stein's, seems to urge towards self-exposure and knowing, since it pre-empts vulnerability with a sardonic disclaimer, it is poetically "knowing". The line addresses the mother from the first stanza of the First Movement, the "best friend" or the oppressive, in the Christian tradition, the ultimate Jewish mother, Mary "It's your mother all the time".[274] The tortured relationship casually returns to the poem but the mother in question is summoned in the movement entitled "Autobiography". She is not necessarily Zukofsky's mother but the "mother" in response to the child, the subject of the autobiography not in Temples but out gathering mushrooms, collecting mold. Consequently, the "mother" becomes the subject of the address, perhaps farcical, perhaps deferential and interested. The progression of time is apparent, "How long ago is it since […]". The figure of the "mother" is stooped and damp with earth and dew, picking the muddy mushrooms suggesting the earth and hands, while the question indicates that "mother" has not been gathering mushrooms for a long time. The reader is meant to thread the clues together and Zukofsky allows a character/relationship/narrative sketch to develop with his skillful economy. But the source of Kindness we find in this movement is not of the deft handling of scant facts and images to impart an immigrant narrative. It is precisely the dramatic pathos of poetic drama, a tension that informs this section and lends to it a quality of "vibrant singularity". Resistance is enacted once again in a deeply personal field so there is an inherent adolescent intolerance, a child's fascination and in fact a sense of love, mushroomy and earthy. Woods examines the cyclical nature of the "other" and the "self" when he observes that within the familial structures in "A—13" "one's sense of self derives from turning to another, and the self is thus always divided, finding its source elsewhere, rather than being located in some form of Being separate from and prior to any consciousness-of-other".[275] This too can be seen as structuring the "Fifth Movement". The turning quality and the presence of the other, the sense of the not fracturing but the loosening of the weave of the self, is the poem's "behaviour". It is such marvelous pirouettes Zukofsky writes that un-pin sentiment, with "knowing" precisely being the constant problem for the poem.

The "knowing" is enacted by the extreme self-consciousness of the language, the constant disclaimer and enacted awareness of the "drama" of poetry as a method

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[274] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.
[275] Woods, 135.

for explaining the drama necessary to make the reader know the poem, as it behaves. For instance, in lines 189 and 194, he asks "189      Is   it   your   mate,   my   father, boating".[276] This line is a symphony of masculine problematics. Why is the Father a "mate"? Does a ship's mate refer to the boat in the line? This seems unlikely since it is much more probable to appear as a mate in the context of the role of Father, the one with whom the mother has mated and made the son, the voice of the poem. Significantly, the father is denied a role within the poem that as a text seems to extend towards and perhaps reject the idea of the beloved husband. This is an example of the poem "behaving" in a certain way, a pragmatic positioning of units rather than the manipulation of an image. It is the economy of word. The father is not even near the shore but is viewed from a distance, asked after and, therefore, not certainly the father. There is doubt inherent in the line, a doubting of itself or an indifference to inexactitude, with the possibility that what the line presents is not in fact, what it presents. This is an object being presented but its potential is interrogated within the line itself. There is an adolescent scorn in the word "mate", an animalizing that must be too simplistic for Zukofsky. The Son-Mother-Father Oedipal love triangle is tapped into here in order to create distance and disdain in the line. The Christian patriarchy of the father and the Semitic maternal lineage of the mother discussed earlier in the chapter are also apparent. These figures meet again in the poem's space as the drama of literary and cultural tension plays out. Alternatively, one could argue that the reason Zukofsky repeats these half-questions is to emphasize the pathos and draw attention to the drama, not to the subject but to the line itself.

The commas in the line play a dramatic role as they break the rhythm of the line until it resembles the bobbing of a boat on water. The rhetoric of the line is the essential subject of the communication of the poem, where sentiment is troubled by knowledge and poetic drama is troubled by self-awareness. This profound self-awareness, the "behaviour" of the text, engages the reader in the struggle to read and know whilst the text critiques its own vanity, artfulness and even its need to posture and to ask. A strong, potent relationship emerges that cannot abide the drama of commas and mothers and fathers. That is, the emotive mocks while it engages meaning and communication. It is deeply resistant yet solipsistic and demanding due to the visceral pull of the parent, "Speaking of epics, mother". An interrogation

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[276] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 15.

develops in terms of the image, a narrative in the form of the parents of the poem emigrating from Russia to New York. The passage is conducted at night and moves from a house, or the Yiddish "hoyze", through "bladed grass" to "cemetery-tenements—". [277] The temperature changes from the heat of a burning stove to the chill of the "bayonets dewed". The danger and violence of soldiers or pogroms is present and mingles with the Yiddish lament "Un in hoyze is kalt". The Hebraic desert appears, recalling the tribes' forty years in the wilderness led by Moses of the bull *rush*es, the original Diaspora. The "desert night" also recalls the Yehoash poem Zukofsky translates in the Second Movement:

| 123 | The Bedouin bears the Desert-Night |
| 124 | Big his heart and young with life |
| 125 | Younger yet his gay, wild wife |
| 126 | The Desert Night.[278] |

This text, in so far as it is a translation, is not Zukofsky's and this husband is not the "mate" of the previous line. The poem tears through image and allusion, forging links and then using them to make new ones. The sudden presence of the Bedouin renegotiates the Father, the adult male figure as a nomadic happy hero, and fleshes out the Mother in a memory that takes place within the text of the poem itself. A joyful "young with life", "gay" and "wild" image of a man and his wife appears, far removed from the distant "mate" of the passive mother. This is a memory from a text that Zukofsky has translated, has written but not known.

Another narrative is manifest that inhabits the Diaspora, one of sexuality and warmth, and yet is sourced from elsewhere within the text itself as the poem responds to gaps in its own imagination by filling them itself. And the next line (191) in Yiddish once again relocates the poem to something that may be a "mother tongue", reaffirming that "It's your mother all of the time". The presence of the internal quote demonstrates the emblematic quality of the components of this section in the "Fifth Movement". Emblems themselves gleam forth in lieu of something else that would allow the poem to possess the narrative and resolve the concern in the passage with speech and voicelessness, and ignorance of emotion as a response to the "drama" necessary in the poetic poem. The voice of the poem is replaced by a quotation from

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[277] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 15.
[278] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 13

Max Stirner's *The Ego and His Own*, which suppresses the poem and seems to be the cause of it:

> 198    And I here, can say only—
> 199           "So then an egoist can never embrace
>                   a party
> 200    Or take up with a party?
> 201    Oh, yes, only he cannot let himself
> 202    Be embraced or taken by the party."[279]

"He cannot let himself/Be embraced". Once again text usurps text and the struggle with voice and assimilation, whether literary or otherwise, continues as the text obliterates voice in this section of "Poem Beginning 'The'". Zukofsky provides a strained and argumentative progression to Pound's compulsion toward allusion and reference. The emblematic quality of Mauberley's own "Luini in porcelain" is strained and restrained with an impenetrable gloss, indicating a fear of ignorance and poetic vulnerability that Pound would not recognize but nevertheless which resonates within this section of the text. It plays out as a constant anxiety that this or these moments have been or are "said better elsewhere", knowing the location of these superior allegories or fragments makes a poem that is so concerned with mapping and proof of its own procedures that it doesn't *mean* or, perhaps more specifically, cannot understand anything apart from its own frustration and voicelessness. This is not Eliot's puppetry, as in "HURRY UP PLEASE IT'S TIME".[280] It is rather a highly polished and reinforced negotiation of the demands upon a modernist poem.

The passage is tightly compacted with pregnant moments and allusions. It is so dense that it seems possible to say it means nothing but this delineates a narrative primed with emotion and history. Yet if the poem itself *means* nothing, this means that in terms of "behaviour" it *means* a great deal, because it is woven so tightly out of other texts and allusions packaged together amongst spiky and emotive rhetorical door-slams. The passage concludes with "204      Tell me, mother".[281] The concern here might perhaps be read as remorse for the blithe, dismissive tone of the first line and an admission of ignorance that is delivered with a virtuosity of reference, reading and knowledge that cannot account for understanding. The vanity and folly exposed

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[279] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 16.
[280] T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land and other poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), 28-29.
[281] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 16.

in the first line where speech and the poetic form are undone as they indicate expertise, "Tell me, mother." The comma indicates a pained ignorance as it meets resistance, while the full-stop demonstrates this frustration as final, as a counter to the confidence and self-interest of the un-finished autobiography of the first line. Conversely, however, dense reference is the only method available to the poem with which to tell the story. That is, a story is told and the poem does nothing as it is rendered impotent by the weight of its references and images. The father, at once the dubious mate, appears in mirage as the Bedouin hero who can "bear the Desert-Night". There is no agenda discernable in the text itself, so once again vulnerability seals the emotive potential and instead delivers virtuosity, the results of which are simultaneously bewildering yet also offer a persuasive narrative. However, it performs that crucial act of seeming to declare, when in fact avoiding poetic drama as a personal disclosure that corrupts the poem.

A poetic practice of avoidance that seeks to sublimate the corruption of personal disclosures and indicates "behaviour" is Zukofsky's frequent returns to translation. The difference is marked from Pound's inclusions of the Ancient Greek language in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". That is, the act of demonstration is weighted on the side of the poem or indeed the poet himself in Zukofsky, as the requirement of translation is the poet's, whereas Pound volleys the Greek into the reader's field, making the ability and responsibility of translation the reader's. In using translation, Zukofsky is in fact enacting an active scholarship as a means of production where once again virtuosity presents the text rather than the text presenting the virtuosity of performance, which would suggest "poetic" poetry and acceptance of what it, itself means. The offered translation of Yiddish, however, has different resonance when it is compared to Pound's ancient Greek. The ancient Greek text for Pound seems to belong to the Imagist category of something that everybody "KNOWS", whereas the literary Yiddish might appear in English translation but it still surfaces. The translated text functions within the poem as more than exclusive virtuosity or a distancing technique. The fable or emblem quality is here again, which accounts for discomfort of meaning and indeed questions the validity of the fable or the poetical modernist equivalent that supposes the image or the thing can account for an ethical "truth". (That is, a "universal truth" being meted out within a poem by virtue of aesthetic integrity.) This interrogation is partially side-stepped and simultaneously brought into

greater relief by the reappearance in the translated lines 216 to 219 of the "barefoot shepherd boy", the male adolescent Jesus as Shepherd, the barefoot Jewish boy.

The reassertion of the figure that so confounds the First Movement is provocative, yet once again is seemingly subsumed by conflation. As lines 205 to 223 are a translation of another different Yehoash poem that initially appears in the "First Movement". The reader, if s/he happens to be aware of it, may consider this act of translation, an extended emblem, an act of accounting for a voice, referring to a *meaning* that the text is not aesthetically entitled to. In this case, the subsuming conflation is the disavowal of the text, which runs concurrent with the text itself. The adolescent male then appears again, Yehoash's adolescent male that Zukofsky translates. But does this transaction pertain to ownership? The appearance of the boy is as follows:

216     A barefoot shepherd boy
217     Striding on the mire:
218     Swishing indifferently a peeled branch
219     On jaded sheep.[282]

The temptation to read Zukofsky himself into this passage is great indeed. It is much more prudent to remember the male figure as producing a discourse within the poem between the reluctant, possibly unaware "self" of the poem and the poem itself. The alienation and isolation of the assimilating youth is clear as he goes "Striding in the mire", evincing an isolated reality and a sense of dutiful purposefulness that perhaps suggests another waste land. The "peeled" state of the branch he is "Swishing indifferently" suggests amendment and a barehanded attempt to renegotiate his tools of direction, persuasion and care. It has been rid of its foliage because it is for a "jaded" flock.

The relationships in this passage reveal exhaustion and an imperative to move, yet a lack of commitment to the flock persists. The emphasis of the action is on the shepherd and the weighty, cumbersome indifference of the "sheep" counteract his stride. Significantly, this shepherd is "Striding on the mire", he does not "Rush singing/in the wilderness". This formulation of the figure of the male youth from the "Fifth Movement" does not formally complicate its reading for the reader, that is, there are no gaps and frustrated conflations that are enacted over full-stops. However,

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[282] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 16

context casts shadows over the "Fifth Movement", the questionable nascence of all of the text rendering the nascence itself questionable. If the "grammar of reading" invites an act of sharing as it informs Kindness, it therefore depends on moments in which the text interacts with itself, as the reader interacts with it. The nascent vulnerability provokes and requires instability in reception and, therefore, a confident rendition of insecurity itself. Knowledge, being compromised by meaning, must be accounted for within a poetic field as the instance of vulnerability accounts for this compromise. Thus Yehoash's "barefoot shepherd boy" strides through Zukofsky's "mire".

The poem enacts observation through translation and the youth figure is at a much greater remove than in the "First Movement". This allows for observation of the figure, a role rather than a chasm. A moment, perhaps, of ease of reading, which is naturally devastated by the fact that this is a translation. This ease is itself an emblem in "Poem Beginning 'The'", it is "Swishing indifferently a peeled branch/On jaded sheep", prompting the question, is the translated text a "peeled branch"?

After the Yehoash translation has run its course in the movement, Zukofsky draws on Yehoash further to extend and draw out Yehoash's horse. Once again, the Diaspora or immigrant experience, the epic, is explored. Within the text, the addressee has become "Lord", evoking the plaintive cry of the First Movement again, "Lord, lord, not that we pray, are sure of the question/ But why are our finest always dead?"[283] This recourse, recurring through the poem itself to the overt religiosity of the unanswerable question, is employed in this movement with far less of the arch speculation inherent in the literary modernist compulsions or convulsions of the first movement. The conflation of the horse metaphor, reading those who scattered and emigrated during the latter part of the nineteenth century and continued to do so from Eastern Europe and Russia as being represented by the horses, and the declarative rhetoric of addressing the "Lord" directly, pulls something troublingly spurious into relief. The metaphor is authenticated or reassured in the repetition of the term "Mate" from the beginning passage, as it is used when the poem addresses "mother", therefore anchoring the metaphor to a human experience. However, the use of the horses is complicated by the willingness of the passage to address a "Lord", a specifically human compulsion that is reminiscent of Williams's "Elysian slobber". The spurious quality is present in this disconnect between the poetic evasion inherent

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[283] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.

in the horse metaphor and the appeal to God, which is the epitome of direct action, albeit verbal and potentially only, verbal. Significantly, it is the voice of the poem that performs and enacts this disconnect. The spurious nature of language or words themselves is interrogated here as metaphor operates as a foil for the abstraction of an appeal to God. Poetry as rhetoric and specifically as appeal or questioning according to direct intentionality is questioned and examined, the aesthetically beautiful quality of the verse notwithstanding.

At this point in the movement, line 238, the compulsion to address the mother, becomes too irresistible, as though the progression of the passage has caught up with itself. The rhetoric implodes, the horses cannot sing and the metaphor itself becomes an argument that must be sung but they cannot sing Bach's mass or indeed the St Matthew Passion. The poem returns to the original formulation, which depends as though for memory and conformation of the self upon the "mother". The punctuation, enacting through the comma, reaches back towards the mother as an ever-present figure behind the voice, "Bach, mother":

238     If horses could but sing Bach, mother,—
239     Remember how I wished it once—
240     Now I kiss you who could never sing Bach,
             never read Shakespeare.[284]

There is a certain anxiety involved in concluding that this passage is *about* Zukofsky and indeed his mother. The "self" of the poem allows the "mother" to inhabit a role that suggests the "mother" is in fact the mother of the poem and, therefore, the self of the poem develops throughout the poem itself by negotiating agency through language. The "self" in this sense realizes the role of the speaker.

The temporal framing of the relationship seems so personal, the moment "Now" suggesting a presence in the text that is a development from the archly rhetorical twists of previous passages. However, "Now I kiss you" is a directional imperative, locating the poem in the present and the speaker, the potential self, as the active component motivating the poem. That is, unlike the sprawling and "behaviourally" hermetic quality of the previous passages, the description is again imperative and locates a self or agency within the text that has previously been conspicuous in its absence, indeed the occasionally fraught tips of its, the self's,

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[284] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 17.

construction. "Now I kiss you" implies a moment of uninhibited intimacy, the mouth of the speaker, the lips. The motifs of memory and wishes, unfulfilled in the previous line, evoke time and history, the self being reflected upon like childhood. Subsequently, "Now I kiss you" demonstrates contact and a sense of loss for the wait, for the kiss. This contact with the mouth not singing Bach but kissing responds to the "never" and seems to be the source of the intimacy of the kiss. That is, the knowledge of "never" accounts for a history. Is there an implicit sense of forgiveness here, a patronizing tenderness because the horses can neither sing Bach nor read Shakespeare and neither can the "mother"? The poem itself goes on to quote Shakespeare in a typically deft moment of collage and defiance. However, there is a sense that vulnerability is not the source of anxiety, it is momentarily relinquished as it has not been forgotten. The voice, the kisser in kissing the mother, acknowledges that she has never read Shakespeare or sung Bach but simultaneously acknowledges that he or it has. This disconnect is not threatening, the attack is dulled by the kiss and the positions are defined. The kiss bestows something on both the text and the mother. The "I" from line 198, the "I" that is unable to speak but must parrot, now kisses, evincing a notion of rhetorical and verbal security that has been unavailable up to this point.

Crucially this lacuna of feeling, engenders a return to the contemporary, the present, "In Manhattan here." The urban hustle and bustle is accounted for by the spatial expansion of line 242, "Up and down, up and down our streets they go…".[285] However, the crowding in the street is not the concern of the poem. Although "the Chinamen are yellow in the face" reads today as offensive ethnic slurring, it operates within the text to lend a sense of an established home, "our streets," and exoticism and alienation regarding that home, a complaint perhaps that burdens the immigrant experience. The specific urban location in the first line/title and the repetition of the "face" and the solid colour is reminiscent of Pound's modernist poem, "In a Station of the Metro":

> The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
> Petals on a wet, black bough.[286]

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[285] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 17.
[286] Pound, *Personæ*, 111.

In this sense, it is possible to read the crudely depicted Asian people who crowd the poem's mother's streets as being conflated with Pound's similarly crudely phrased Asian Haiku-style imperatives to Imagism. More broadly, the Chinese Ideogram, as Fenellosa terms it and Pound expounds it, derive exoticism and esotericism from those aesthetic moments of certainty and knowledge which retain the ethereal, emblematic ephemerality of the established immigrant America though always necessarily foreign. The conflation of the Imagist doctrine and its most seminal production within the faces of urban immigrants on the Lower East Side is an exemplary example of Zukofsky's nifty aggression towards Eurocentric, learned esotericism and his compulsion to enact a mastery of it. These faces crowd Zukofsky's "mire" or Manhattan:

> 241    In Manhattan here the Chinamen are yellow
> in the face, mother,
> 242    Up and down, up and down our streets they
> go yellow in the face,[287]

The faces reoccur throughout the rest of the passage and imply a specifically bemoaned deficiency of colour:

> 248    But she has more color in her cheeks than
> the Angels—Angels—mother,—
> 249    They have enough, though. We should
> get some more color, mother.
> 250    If I am like them in the rest, I should
> resemble them in that, mother,[288]

The response to this assumed and pained deficiency is to quote Shakespeare, or rather to use Shakespeare in another defensive yet vulnerable move. Shylock, perhaps the most famous canonical Jewish character written by a Gentile in all of literature, delivers his most famous speech as characterized by the line "If you prick us do we not bleed?" The web of defense is becoming rather tangled. Zukofsky essentially uses the Shakespearean syntax, rhythms, and phrasing of Shylock's formulation, "If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that".[289] Zukofsky's compulsion to

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[287] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 17.
[288] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 17.
[289] "To bait fish withal! if it will feed nothing else it will feed my revenge…He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my

vulnerability requires the text to undermine Shylock himself. That is, the speech, being a deeply impassioned exhortation to an anti-Semitic society to recognize his humanity and the humanity of the Jewish people as a whole, is applied in this now faintly nauseating scheme of declaration or plea to a silent mother. It is, however, a marvelous double-cross for "Poem Beginning 'The'" focuses its reading of Shakespeare as a writer who is significantly white, that is, non-Jewish. It reads the Gentile history of classical literature as a cruel oppressor yet a fantastically attractive means of achieving ascension to the desirable status that Gentile respect represents, an exclusive and inclusive place that is contingent on possessing certain knowledge. Therefore, when the text uses Shakespeare to address the mother, a Jewish son addresses a Jewish mother in terms set forth by a Jewish character arguing for his humanity as a Jew with a group of Gentiles by highlighting their sameness. Who or what then is being interrogated, the son, the assimilationist, the mother, Shylock, Shakespeare, the Gentile canon? What does it mean that Shylock has become internalized within the poem, incorporated into the very fabric of the text? Similarly, Poe has been appropriated in the "Fourth Movement" to demonstrate the absurdity of purchasable elitism. Consequently, perhaps Shylock's phrase demonstrates the internalized conflict that engenders rage and in doing so reveals the absurdity of rage. In a perfectly slippery moment of assumed tangibility, Shakespeare is manipulated, even imploded. Yet the speech is present, "We should get some more color, mother".[290] This reverses the logic of Shylock's speech and inverts it so it appears as an *imperative* to resemble the Gentiles in order to read Shakespeare, to demand comprehensive humanity as Shylock does. The strange internal rhyme of "mother" and "color" troubles the passage as the words seem aurally interlocked, the deficiency of colour is shared by the mother as a problem acknowledged by Shylock, a canonical mouthpiece for the ostracized Jew.

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bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies—and what's his reason? I am a Jew… Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? *if we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.* If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why revenge. The villainy you teach me, I will execute and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction." William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (Cambridge: University Press, Cambridge, 1953), 43.

[290] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 17.

The implausibility of the poem's frantic state of imploded logic is perhaps more clear in line, "253     I might as well look Shagetz as much as Jew".[291] Zukofsky uses Yiddish here to undermine the idea that one can or might ultimately fit in to a Gentile world. Using the word *Shagetz,* a Yiddish word for a non-Jewish man, is to enact Jewish/Yiddish culture itself according to the poem. The "*Shagetz"* and the "Jew" are essentially interchangeable as both are syntactical markers of Judaism itself. The naming and language as one in the same, which approaches agency, delineates agency within the problematized realization or conception of Judaism in the text as a whole. Significantly, at this moment in the poem, Zukofsky declares that language, albeit Yiddish, constructs the Jewish person as much as Yiddish, a specifically Jewish language, constructs the non-Jewish person and the resultant binary of us-them is interdependent and defining. The presence of the binary itself, which is accepted within the text, responds to notions of "universal truth", which demonstrably problematizes the idea that a text can truly accommodate objectivity of perception, thus a binary, which hinges on more than one experience in the context of a sameness of relationship that identifies subjectivity itself as informing the text. Therefore, a sense of universality of truth is un-done by a rhetoric of apparently angered self-doubt. This is the problem being exposed as Shylock's logic is imploded and then subsequently rebuilt in the guise of an intellectually violent threat.

Shylock's final phrase, with all its grim portents, resonates in a familiarly sardonic half-truth kind of way throughout the text, "The villainy you teach me, I will execute and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction".[292] The phrase is also incorporated into the text after the promise to "read their Donne as mine". Once again, the object of the phrase is switched, it is no longer "we" and "them" for "I" and "them" but rather "I" for "I" and "them" replaces "you". The voice is repositioned, it is more syntactically alienated and readdresses the vitriol:

> 258    The villainy they teach me I will execute
> 259    And it shall go hard with them,
> 260    For I'll better the instruction,
> 261    Having learned, so to speak, in their
>            colleges.[293]

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[291] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 17.
[292] Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, 43.
[293] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 18.

The last line of the passage is obviously crucial as the poem's own amendment to Shylock's soliloquy, "Having learned, so to speak in their colleges". It is evident that towards the end of this "Fifth Movement" some resolution is sought. The problem of speech being corrupted by the vernacular "Dawn't you think Trawtsky rawthaw a darrling," is implied or the impossibility of saying/speaking when confronted with unknowable knowledge or understanding, as "And I here, can I say only—" finds vocal solution.[294] It is almost as though the whole body of the poem is implicit in the first line of the movement and line 261:

> 186     Speaking about epics, mother,
> […]
> 261     Having learned, so to speak, in their
>                     colleges.[295]

The body of the "Fifth Movement" is contained in these two bookend lines, each of which belies profound anxiety. "So to speak" means "I am not being clear", that is, "I am consciously using speech that represents something other than what I am saying". Crucially, the text has not "learned to speak" but has "learned, *so* to speak", it has learned the various formulas and motifs of communication that a thorough, classical education promises and in doing so has learnt the means to undo the structures upon which that is based.  In learning "so to speak", one is precisely deviating from the presumed premises of learning itself. Irreverence permeates each line although its focus shifts. The troubling posture of the first line retains its veneer, of supercilious exactitude, however the vaguely contemptible other is now the College rather than the silent ignorance of the mother. Significantly though, each line relies on an external figure for its addressee and similarly its subject. In the first line, the "epic" features in lieu of the "college". I would argue that the development of the relationship throughout the movement peaks in line 240, "Now I kiss you who could never sing Bach, never read Shakespeare". That is, this line produces the watershed moment of development of thought and indeed self-awareness throughout the poem, which afterwards clings resolutely to its mother.

The movement ends in a flurry of quotation, the contextual textures of which sketch out a clash of identity to suggest a disparity between what is seen to be and

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[294] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 17.
[295] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 15/18.

what in fact is in the context of the poem. Visibility is crucial as Bassanio ponders which casket he should select in order to win Portia's hand, "It is engendered in the eyes".[296] The deceptive nature of appearances is implicit. When Heinrich Heine's hero of "Donna Clara", an ideal lover, reveals himself to his anti-Semitic mistress as "the Son of the Respected Rabbi" the joke is on her. These series of quotations further reinforce the idea of the inversion of Shylock's logic, suggesting that appearances or rather a semblance of sameness can be deceptive if one acknowledges difference. Furthermore, in the text itself, if apparently concerned with representing itself through quotation and allusion, the self has once again faded away. The final line is entirely in Yiddish, "269 Keine Kadish wird man sagen".[297] Another quotation from Heine, which means "No Kadish will be said", returns to the opening line, the mourning song in the Kadish, a song of death that resonates with the epic and more generally with the autobiography of the title. It is evident, however, that "autobiography" is evaded in the poem, whose method uses reading to write as a substitute. Distance is created and the text itself becomes isolated. Text swallows the 'self' of the text as the final line literally speaks to the problem of speech throughout the movement. Ending on an imperative to record yet declaring silence and indeed a silencing of Hebrew itself foregrounds a knowing silencing of the Jewish funeral song, which is suppressed within the text as it appears in Yiddish.

The final "Half-Dozenth Movement: *Finale, and After*" provides a grand finale to the poem. It abounds with music, through Beethoven and Bach, and theatre, in the form of Ibsen, and German and Yiddish "folk songs" in Heine and Yehoash, "Helen Gentile".[298] It is an exhaustive and exhausting finale, accounting perhaps for the dissembled "mother" as an operative of aspiration for knowledge and conversely learning:

> 273     What will my heart be bartering, mother,
> 274         Wisdom, learning.
> 275     Lullaby, lullaby, lullaby, lullaby.[299]

Softness is engendered and a nascent question regarding the humanity of knowledge is proposed. That is, the division of wisdom and learning are soothed by the gentility

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[296] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 18.
[297] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 18.
[298] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 19.
[299] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 18.

of the lullaby as memory. The "mother" has punctuated so much of the preceding movement in the same form, after a comma at the end of a line a question posed and then there is recourse to some sort of shelter. The word "mother" as forming rhyme and structure lends a lullaby quality to the text itself.  The text reminds itself that "I have not forgotten you, mother—", with the double-beat of the word "mother" evoking a heartbeat sporadically pumping throughout the text. It is possible to read this as an accepting enactment of the declarations of the first movement, "It's your mother all the time".[300] At this point in the poem, "It" has been expounded to *mean* a consciousness of the self, that is, an awareness and doubt of the nascence and development of the self in the text. She can represent recourse to the pain of origin and the essential prescience of the experience of development, reflecting or presenting the pain that memory causes, and indeed, the painful demands of learning. The crucial conflict within the text, the vulnerability of doubt, meets here with the necessity of declaration.

The vital question then is does this exposure constitute what this thesis posits as Kindness? A wounded hostility "behaves" throughout the text by means of distance and sardonic appropriation. It renders the text at times highly inscrutable. The natural argument here would be that such "behaviour" compels the reading and, by extension, the reader to struggle with the text itself as a frustrated challenge. Furthermore, the performance of impenetrability is key to the struggle and this "behaviour" resonates also with an anticipatory anxiety about a possible failure to be understood. The poem demonstrably has a mode of "behaviour" that is stronger than any sense of agency of meaning because its agency *is* its "behaviour". That is, the struggle is the poem because the resolution is specifically *not* its meaning. Fragmentary understanding of the "self" is in opposition to everything other and allows Zukofsky to construct a poem that means itself as a poem and is an exploration of what it means to be written. This phenomenon accounts for the doubt inherent in the text. However, the doubt is contagious and the reader hesitates at every turn to put *meaning* into the reading. For example, in line 313, "O my son Sun, my son, my son Sun! …" the "Sun" and the "son" are forcefully confused.[301] This provides a textual enactment of the solipsistic central figure of the son, the young male, around which the poem functions and forms, indeed orbits. This doubling up of words and the deliberate semantic shifts

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[300] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 9.
[301] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 19.

mean that simply reading the poem evinces a type of knowing that is itself riddled with doubt, thus creating an uncomfortable posture of suspicion. This is why, or maybe how, the "mother" features to draw the reader in with a sense of potential comfort, memory and a sense of self before casting him/her off again in acts of demonstrable scholarship.

This oscillation informing the text forces the reader to inhabit it as something varied and undecided. Whether or not this is Kind is difficult to determine for certain because it is a poem that so thoroughly resists sharing, rather it *exposes* itself, which provides an opportunity for the reader to *know* in a visceral sense. The result is uncomfortable; the self of the poem reflected therein is not only fleeting but difficult and necessarily compromised. It has always been important to remember that kindness does not mean niceness. It refers on a base level to the potential to share, so how can we read this emblematic poem that so committedly strives to protect itself, as sharing. This inherent struggle is the struggle of reading it itself but does this constitute sharing? The movement concludes with musicality and a gentle muscularity of syntax, repetition and safety of the triangular comfort of arms are opened wide:

327    How wide out arms are,
328    How strong,
329    A myriad years we have been,
330    Myriad upon myriad shall be.[302]

The concluding lines of "Poem Beginning 'The'" seem to resonate with a sense of rested victory or rather the inevitability of survival. This "myriad" of continuation and support suggests the continuation of the anxieties about vulnerability that have pervaded this reading of the text. That is, in the one sense that indicates the necessity for support and survival and, perhaps more crucially, the idea that there is no certainty in the future, there is no finality in these repeated myriads. In a letter to Pound from 1927, Zukofsky expresses an anxiety about the ending of the poem itself, explaining how the "Fact is I fear not so much the second movement, as the too precipitous end. Its chanted faith hardly begins to be buttressed, id est [sic] I feel it might have been, may still be, the beginning of something else".[303] Zukofsky's "Poem Beginning 'The'", therefore, ends with what the poet considers to be another

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[302] Zukofsky, *ANEW*, 20.
[303] Pound and Zukofsky and Ahearn, 5.

beginning. The innumerable quality reinforced by repetition opens the end of the poem itself. This myriad is in very definite contrast to Pound's "myriad" in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", which is so final and grim in the observation that "There died a myriad".[304] Pound's declaration, it can be argued, laments the certainty of loss, the stopping short of the future, whereas Zukofsky's anticipates the unending and unfolding of the myriad itself. This illustrates a key point of distinction between Zukofsky and his forbears, how the lack of certainty in Zukofsky's open-ending is in distinct contrast to the finality of Pound's encompassing finality.

I have read this as vulnerability in Zukofsky's poem because it functions as a means for renegotiating a notion of Kindness. Nevertheless, it remains difficult to wring Kindness from the rather impervious, emotionally reserved and studied perspective of "Poem Beginning 'The'", a perspective that continues into the next chapter on the shorter early works of Reznikoff and Oppen. The Kindness I am elucidating is now mobilized by a sense of questioning, while the acknowledgment of uncertainty in a poem is examined and mediated through my "grammar of reading" as it addresses and mediates the crisp aesthetics of earlier modernist poetry. The analyses of Oppen and Reznikoff, therefore, move towards Kindness as the readings continue to focus on the reading these poems in and for exile, and the sense of wonder and alienation that these texts present. As Kindness proposes, they are read in exile, whether they are considered examples of assimilation or not.

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[304] Pound, *Personæ*, 188.

# Chapter 5. Unions in Poetry: Behaviour and Form in Reznikoff and Oppen

> *What I felt I was doing was beginning from Imagism as a position of honesty.*[305]

Writing to Elizabeth Kray in 1966/67, Oppen related the story of how:

> Sometime about 1935 or the end of 34 more likely … Louis in friendship or partly in friendship and partly to demand to know whether my poetic practice was a conscious rebuke to him, attacked the bareness, the lack of defense of *Discrete Series*. In the end he was defining a tactics to me. I was startled and finally said: Louis, you're tougher than I am.[306]

He goes on to consider how hurt Zukofsky had been by his choice of the word "tough" and how he had even shocked himself by using it. Oppen refers to his privileged childhood and marvels at how out of character it was for him to employ a slang term like "tough." He is amused at the incongruity of describing Zukofsky as "tough" since "Louis, [was] a sensitive and physically fragile boy who had grown up in the slums".[307] He is shocked too by how appalled Zukofsky is by his choice of words, who was visibly hurt by them. What the young Oppen meant by "tough" is important to this thesis because he meant that because Zukofsky had grown up weak and poor he was "tough". He assumed what Zukofsky meant when he challenged the "lack of defense of *Discrete Series*" was a direct result of his (Oppen's) privilege, "I thought of […] ambition, as lower class", to which Zukofsky responds "you wouldn't use that word if you knew what it meant".[308]

This anecdote, which Oppen remembered for over thirty years, is beautifully illustrative of the tensions identified in "Poem Beginning 'The'". The self-conscious wordsmithing Zukofsky produces is both defensive and tactical, redolent with figures of boyhood. Zukofsky's observations of the "lack of defense of *Discrete Series*" describes the howl in "Poem Beginning 'The'". Oppen's and Reznikoff's early

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[305] George Oppen and Richard Swigg, *Speaking with George Oppen, Interviews with the Poet and Mary Oppen, 1968-1987,* ed, by Richard Swigg (Jefferson N C; London: McFarland and Company, inc., 2012), 9.
[306] George Oppen, *The Selected Letters of George Oppen,* ed. by Rachel Blau DuPlessis, (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1990), 152.
[307] Oppen, *Selected Letters*, 152.
[308] Oppen, *Selected Letters*, 152.

Objectivist works do have a certain bareness to them, the former more so than the latter, but this is not to say they are stark but rather they are exposed or directly uncomplicated. It is a bareness that, as Oppen's story might suggest, resembles the soft, exposed skin of someone who has not yet fought or gotten dirty. Reznikoff produces extraordinarily open poems that somehow do not seem exposed, whereas Oppen's poems are almost completely exposed and yet not open. The primary point is that they each produce poems that respond to the vulnerability of the poem itself in different ways. They negotiate vulnerability with a patience of mind and a steadiness of gaze, emotion and feeling, while still remaining somehow tight or even cautious and diligent, hence their relevance to a concluding argument about Kindness. Their respective negotiations provide the most explicitly "behavioural" approach to verse that is, if not tough necessarily, then at least tactical, as vulnerability combines with Kindness.

Upon Ezra Pound's suggestion, Harriett Monroe gave Louis Zukofsky the opportunity to guest edit her magazine *Poetry* in 1931, which afforded Zukofsky the opportunity to showcase the work of the relatively new poetic milieu in which he was a central figure. These second-generation American modernists had largely been influenced by Pound's Imagism and the associated imperative toward sincerity in syntax and form, and the qualities of the experienced symbol as it is perceived. Bernstein calls these second-wave modernists. Monroe insisted that the loose group Zukofsky presented needed a name, thus the Objectivists were born. Zukofsky, like his complicated mentor Pound, had to an extent fathered a movement. Indebted in their roots to the Imagist aesthetic, the Objectivists were not like the preceding group in the sense that the Imagists represented a sprawling poetic landscape or territory that Pound staked and claimed. Instead, the Objectivists represent a group who formed after the first wave modernist groups had formed and demonstrate amongst other things, extreme self-consciousness of production, a unified sense of aesthetic purpose, and a developed sense of the aesthetic imperatives of Imagism, which together lend the Objectivists a sense of stability a patience of mind.

However, while this sensitive, steady gaze may be the most prominent commonality in the Objectivist oeuvre, the works of its members differ greatly while also sharing the same anchor. This might explain why Kenner sought to neuter and erode the edges of the group as he discusses them in *A Homemade World*:

The Objectivists seem to have been born mature, not to say middle-aged. The quality of their youthful work is that of men who have inherited a formed tradition: the tradition over the cradle of which, less than twenty years previously, Ezra Pound had hoped to have Henry James, O. M., speak a few sponsoring words. They are the best testimony to the strength of that tradition: to the fact that it had substance separable from the revolutionary high spirits of its launching. None of them makes as if to ignite bourgeois trousers. All that was history. They simply got on with their work.[309]

Kenner locates this "maturity" within the sense of aesthetic security the Objectivists received from their renowned predecessors. I would argue, however, Kenner's remarks here miss the point of the Objectivist project. They are often read as effectively being dismissive, see Jennison for example, but Kenner seems to empathize with the position the Objectivists occupy according to his understanding, which serves to reinforce the notion that the Objectivists could not or did not produce anything new, thus failing in the Poundian sense. However, as I have demonstrated, more recent criticism has found that the Objectivist project was not simply to follow a recipe written by Pound, in particular the cultural and theoretical criticism that has revealed Objectivists to be engaged in much more radical poetic negotiations in order to address the assumptive prescriptions of cultural hegemony that the first generation modernists exemplified. Reznikoff, for example, is often the focus of critical work concerned primarily with the legacy of Jewish American literature.[310] The modernist security Kenner that argues the movement is couched in is, in essence, the idea of sincerity itself as it developed from the Imagist tradition. However, this sincerity is constantly at stake for the Objectivists because it is a process rather than a given.

Perhaps there is something unfeasibly secure in Zukofsky's proposed "rested totality" even though he makes it clear that it is only an aspirational condition of poetry that develops from the security of "Sincerity" itself. As Zukofsky proposes, "rested totality" informs the idea of the inarticulate nature of poetic "behavioural" reading and, therefore, Kindness. He explains how:

distinct from print which records action and existence and incites the mind to further suggestion, there exists, tho it may not be harboured as solidity in the

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[309] Kenner, *A Homemade World*, 169.
[310] Ranen-Omer Sherman and Stephen Fredman use this lens to examine Reznikoff's work.

crook of an elbow writing (audibility in two-dimensional print) which is an object or affects the mind as such.[311]

The intangibility of tangible ideas and the negotiation between those two states of understanding is crucial to my notion of Kindness. As a result, this chapter will further define the nature of this intangibility, with particular reference to the distinction between form and "behaviour" in poetry. The implications of Kenner's terms will also feed into this chapter, especially "work" because of the influence it has on the residual nature of "behaviour" in a poem. This thesis is interested exploring the implications of the aesthetic genealogy, between the Objectivists and the Imagist tradition, just as DuPlessis and Quartermain extend Kenner's approximation of the Objectivist "genealogy" to cover not only Pound but also "Williams, and in some cases, Stein, Stevens, and Moore".[312] In broadening the range of this lineage, they expand Kenner's somewhat limiting perspective to include poets who are modernist "thoroughbreds" with broadly different styles and poetic voices. According to Kindness, Kenner's impression of the middle-aged, somewhat muted quality of the Objectivists is remiss.

The Objectivists may take direction from their modernist predecessors but this does not mean they simply mimic them in a less engaged manner. Their appropriation and renegotiation of sincerity amongst other doctrines of Imagism furnishes the Objectivists with an aesthetic resource that later fundamentally informs their poems. To accept that Kenner has the Objectivists pegged as diligent copyists is to disavow the project Zukofsky presents. To be a modernist in urban America but neither born to a Classical/Hellenic/Christian legacy nor necessarily committed to assimilating to one presents a series of distortions to the Imagist tradition that unavoidably disrupt and reinvent the Imagist tradition with the effect of making it new. Conversely, the Objectivists disappoint Bloom in his essay "The Sorrows of American-Jewish Poetry", where he laments Reznikoff's failure to conform to his own narrowly conceived ideal of what American-Jewish poetry should have been at the beginning of the twentieth century. He describes Reznikoff's work as depressing him "with a sense of unnecessary loss" because the poet does not write how a Jewish poet *should* have

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[311] Louis Zukofsky, *An "Objectivists" Anthology* ed. By Louis Zukofsky (Le Beausset, Var, France; New York: TO Publishers, 1932), 204.
[312] Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Peter Quartermain, "Introduction", in *The Objectivist Nexus*, ed. by DuPlessis and Quartermain, 2.

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written if he intended to be of any use to subsequent Jewish poets.[313] Reznikoff is, according to Bloom, too preoccupied with affecting a modernist idiom. Placing Kenner and Bloom's comments side by side suggests a reading of the Objectivists as somehow poetically robbing Peter to pay Paul that fails to acknowledge the newness of their poetic project. The newness I refer to here is found negotiations of the Imagist poetic and the urban American, second-generation immigrant experience. This combination forges poetic bonds between certainty and doubt, and knowledge and "behaviour" in poetic moments. Stephen Fredman illustrates Kenner's analysis of the relationship between Objectivism and Imagism as "something like comparing embattled revolutionaries to the heirs of a comfortable legacy".[314] Quite to the contrary, in fact, the Objectivists engage in new battles to develop their poetic and, most importantly for this thesis, go further in approaching Kindness.

Peter Nicholls defends Oppen from Kenner's summation when he writes:

> The lightness of touch and the epigrammatic brevities of some of the poems in *Discrete Series* tend to conceal the extent to which these early works actually contained the germ of a large-scale disassociation of Oppen's own work from modernism broadly conceived. We have to do, then, not with late expression of a 'formed tradition' [Kenner], but with a sort of reconfiguring of modernism from within, and one that seems the more striking for the low-key way in which it was carried out.[315]

Nicholl's term "low-key" throws an interesting light on the Objectivists but in specific relation to Oppen's project it introduces an idea of doubt, how the sincerity of the Objectivist project meant not to assuage but to interrogate. In a frequently quoted interview with L. S. Dembo, Oppen describes his perspective on the Objectivist relationship with the "Imagist intensity of vision":

> The other point for me, and I think for Louis, too, was the attempt to construct meaning, to construct a method of thought from the imagist technique of poetry—from the Imagist intensity of vision. If no one were going to challenge me, I would say, "a test of truth." If I had to back it up I'd say anyway, "a test of sincerity"—that there is a moment, an actual time, when you construct a meaning from these moments of conviction.[316]

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[313] Harold Bloom, *Figures of Capable Imagination* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), 251.
[314] Stephen Fredman, *A Menorah for Athena; Charles Reznikoff and the Jewish Dilemmas of Objectivist Poetry* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 2.
[315] Peter Nicholls, *George Oppen and The Fate of Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10.
[316] Oppen, *Speaking with George Oppen*, 11.

Oppen finishes his point with the idea of conviction and provides a highly significant moment as it illustrates the idea that what the poet means to achieve is perhaps not exactly certainty but conviction through his own Imagistic approach. That is, to use the Imagist aesthetic of confidence to achieve an intensity of conviction, which reflects the idea of the Objectivist interrogation of doubt and also further supports the idea of the shift in "behaviour" between the Objectivist poem and the Imagist poem.

Oppen, in retrospect, outlined what he understood the Objectivist project to represent. Crucially, he addresses notions of truth, honesty and sincerity as central to, and complicating factors in, Objectivism itself:

> What I felt I was doing was beginning from Imagism as a position of honesty. The first question at that time in poetry was simply the question of honesty, of sincerity. But I learned from Louis, as against the romanticism or even the quaintness of the Imagist position, the necessity for forming a poem properly, for achieving form. That's what "Objectivist" really means. There's been tremendous misunderstanding about that. People assume that it means psychologically objective in attitude. It actually means the objectification of the poem, the making an object of the poem.[317]

What Oppen learned from "Louis" was "against the romanticism or even quaintness of the Imagist position". Perhaps Oppen means here is that the Objectivists resist the sublime in the Romantic sense as representing the philosophical position of awe, wonder and terror in the face of a majestic and picturesque truth. It is a fascinating observation that we also see in J. M. W. Turner and Constable in Oppen's vision of the Imagists. In their posture of bravery, experimentalism and radicalism, their unflinching gaze upon the world and their assumed total emotional, if not comprehension at least, comfortability with the project of understanding or accepting it, similar to how Pound insists he is "more interested in life than in any part of it".[318] Also inherent in their Romanticism is the conviction that the application of the correct aesthetic model could render emotional truths that carried the unassailability of scientific fact. The Romantics, one might argue, in their wonder and confoundment, marvel and quake as they practice containing the world around them with broad brushstrokes and daubs of colour and light. The Imagist moment is apparent in

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[317] Oppen, *Speaking with George Oppen*, 9.
[318] Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965,* 23.

Wordsworth's summation of poetry, "For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings".[319]

Fredman considers the works of the Romantics, in particular William Blake's poems "Jerusalem" and "Innocence", as being ideological and active influences on the romantic *flanneur* aspect of Reznikoff's verse while definitely eschewing the Romantic stylistics of verse.[320] "Jerusalem" is connected by Omer-Sherman to the analogies of the British-Romantic, sublime poets, linking "Hebraic exile with Wordsworthian Romanticism". Using Reznikoff's poem number 20 from *Inscriptions: 1944—1956*, Omer-Sherman highlights the thematic similarities linking the Diaspora in modernity with the negotiations of the industrial during the Romantic period:

> In its folkish analogy of Creation and the urban present, the lyric enacts a sanctification of diasporic space. Reznikoff's poetry transfers the sacredness sometimes reserved for the pastoral spaces of Arcadia to the American, urban present, a space where his insistent rebukes to insularity, bigotry, and indifference form a corollary for his poetic examinations of Jewish history.[321]

The folkish element Omer-Sherman mentions may seem to be the function of a certain Kindness in Reznikoff's verse because it also engenders something approaching one particular aspect of Kindness.

The proletarian element that seeks to speak to and of the everyday, paired with the steady and, if not universal, indelible intensity of vision his poems present, suggests an approachability and sincerity that indeed seems kind. For example, consider "The Idiot" from *Rhythms II*:

> With green stagnant eyes,
> arms and legs
> loose ends of string in a wind,
>
> keep smiling at your father.[322]

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[319] William Wordsworth, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: Lyrical Ballads 1798, Edited, with an Introduction, Notes and Appendix containing Wordsworth's Preface of 1899, By Harold Littledale* (London: Henry Frowde, 1911), 228.
[320] Fredman, *A Menorah for Athena*, 149.
[321] Ranen Omer-Sherman, *Diaspora and Zionism in Jewish American Literature* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2002), 115.
[322] Reznikoff, *The Poems*, 12.

We can observe here the proletarian consciousness that levels its gaze at the person in the street, making the title seem less than generous. As a word choice it is so outdated to be beside the point but the last line sings with something akin to empathy, making the reader see what is not there. From the perspective of Kindness as a "grammar of reading" the poem compels the reader to have insight, to understand the image before him/her. That is not to say that the poem demands empathy toward the loose-limbed figure in the poem, but that it poses a question of sharing with the reader both simply and securely. The poem presents an exiled assemblage. The "vibrant singularity" of the poem is read in Kindness as an object/even/encounter that is tangible and yet lies beyond the containable, finite, or sublime. The final line could be read as cruel, and dismissive but the reader might also recognize the embedded narrative of empathy and read a reparative empathy in it.

A sense of the Romantic trend observed in the Imagist project can be read as present, in spirit at least, in the Objectivists, particularly in terms of the specifically American alternative to European Romanticism. Transcendentalism and its Emersonian transparent eyeball are characterized by an affinity with nature and truth and with comprehending the spiritual through the real in a specifically American way.[323] Ralph Waldo Emerson, the figurehead of the movement, seems to anticipate the Objectivist field of interest in his 1837 address "The American Scholar":

> Instead of the sublime and beautiful, the near, the low, the common, was explored and poeticized. That which had been negligently trodden underfoot by those who were harnessing themselves for long journeys into far countries, is suddenly found to be richer than all foreign parts. The literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are topics of the time. […] I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art, or Provencal Minstrelsy; I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds. What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eye […] [324]

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[323] David Herd, has discussed this correlation in terms of Emerson's call for "enthusiasm" as a revolutionary and defining means by which we might understand modern American writing. He explores the paradox of enthusiasm as he defines it and largely characterizes the modern American literary project as, if by no means singular, is at least propelled by an Emersonian sense of enthusiasm. Enthusiasm it should be noted, is perhaps the only requirement for the grammar of reading: Kindness.

[324] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson: Volume 1: Nature, Addresses, and Lectures,* ed. by Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 67-68.

The poems of Williams, Reznikoff, Oppen, Zukofsky, Pound and even Stein seem to be anticipated here. The most relevant part for my argument is Emerson's emphasis not only on the American as subject but an emphasis on the lowly too.[325] We might remember the self-enforced exile Pound outlines in "Patria Mia", where the transcendentalist ideology is used to negotiate American exile while also embracing a sense of Nationhood through the motif of ordinary, contemporary American life as evident in the Emerson quote above. This is not to suggest that the British Romantics were not invested in the language and the poetic they could wring from the "lowly" also given the importance of a common, i.e. a lowly, poor, rural or rustic subject as closer to nature and, therefore, more human, authentic or "*true*".[326] Wordsworth wrote that the purpose of the *Lyrical Ballads* "will be found principally to be: namely, to illustrate the manner in which our feelings and ideas are associated in a state of excitement. But speaking in less general language, it is to follow the great and simple affections of our nature".[327] Emerson dissuades the poet from the classics and encourages him/her to look about to the American project, the American person as a means to feed the new and vital poetic. Recall Pound's lament for his homeland's project that was "Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn".[328]

## Reznikoff: Kindness and poetic "behaviour" in the urban encounter

Reznikoff's daily walks through Manhattan fed a great deal of his poetry. The short, often whimsical, fleeting, tragic and beautiful poems make up the majority of the type work to be discussed here, suggesting the poet went about on a sort of poetic hunt to find his subjects. However, this seems too aggressive. It is perhaps more appropriate

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[325] On Emerson and Reznikoff, Omer-Sherman argues that "There is more than an act self-legitimizing here; transferring the Transcendentalist ethos to the urban scene, he both fulfills and enlarges Emerson's charge. What he observed in the American city reflected his Jewish modernism and vice versa: a sense of homelessness (literal and metaphysical)" Omer-Sherman, *Diaspora and Zionism*, 117.
[326] Naturally the Romantic negotiation with the Industrial revolution is highly significant in this. The sense that the Industrial Revolution presented the poet with something that corrupted the nature of man, or at least the nature of the vista rendered the countryside and nature itself, be it bucolic or awe-inspiring somehow more *true* and more human than the rapidly growing smokestacks and cities that contained the bulbous majority of life.
[327] Wordsworth, 229.
[328] Pound, *Personæ*, 185.

to consider Reznikoff as being available on his walks since there is the sense that he means to be present so the poem might come to be. Oppen explains that:

> It is possible to find a metaphor for anything, an analogue: but the image is encountered, not found; it is an account of the poet's perception, the act of perception is a test of sincerity, a test of conviction, the rare poetic quality of truthfulness.[329]

We can locate Reznikoff's imperative to walk the streets of Manhattan to seek the encounter that renders the poem "sincere". This poetic meandering and nuanced recording of images, scenes and people anticipates De Certeau's discourse on "walkers". Reznikoff's poetic seems to precisely pick up on these walkers whilst it walks itself:

> They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban "text" they write without being able to read it. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms.[330]

The intuitive, quality that De Certeau expresses here is crucial in Reznikoff's poetic. However, the blindness of De Certeau's walkers presents an interesting perspective on Reznikoff's figures, or rather his poems, which intend to be or indeed behave with the idea of clarity as central to them. Fredman identifies that Reznikoff's poetic, indeed his entire body of work:

> resides in plain sight, inviting neither reference-hunting nor interpretation as a psychodynamic struggle. In opposition to the modes of twentieth-century poetry that have managed to gain critical acclaim, Reznikoff devoted himself to banishing obscurities from his poetry, presenting instead a bare pattern of events in the brightest possible light.[331]

The mystery inviting intuition is in the poem itself. Its "behavioural" agency conducts the "psychodynamic struggle." That is, the quality of the poem that watches and observes is distinct from the quality that renders it and this duality engenders, perhaps even demands, intuitive reading. In this sense, we might recall vibrant materiality, the

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[329] George Oppen, "The Mind's own Place", in *George Oppen: Selected Prose, Daybooks and Papers, Edited by Stephen Cope* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007), 31-2.
[330] De Certeau, 93.
[331] Fredman, 11.

lively matter that provokes reciprocal relations with objects discerned by Bennett before the storm drain in Baltimore can be experienced before the poems of Reznikoff.

In 1927, Reznikoff published *A Fifth Group of Verse*, a series of poems beginning with this rather self-reflexive imperative:

> I charge you, lips and teeth,
> keep watch upon my tongue:
> silence is legal tender everywhere.[332]

This poem starts off not too far from Zukofsky's "Poem beginning 'The'". Voice is crucial, indeed it is the subject for Reznikoff on this occasion. It is the implicit addressee recalling "Poem Beginning 'The'" as "voice" and "I" become irretrievably tangled, distinct yet inseparable. The poem initially appears to essentially be a charming gatekeeper in whose "charge" is the stone tablet one would expect to find it engraved upon. Poem Number 19 of *Jerusalem the Golden* is entitled "For an Inscription over the Entrance to a Subway Station". Reznikoff is, it can be argued, thinking, at least passingly, in these monumental yet street level scales. The textuality and substance is crucial to the poem itself due to its apparently commanding tone, its warning. There is possibly the gargoyle with "lips", "teeth" and "tongue" keeping watch. This reading provides an almost modernist Gothicism. The stony "silence" of the inner-monologue and exhortation to silence seem to retreat from the urban bustle of modernity, removed and tense but suggesting an observer rather than a participant and a patience of mind. "Silence" itself has a malleable quality as it provides comfort and safety while also implying danger. The poetic action of the silencing far outweighs the significance of the silence itself, which is swallowed immediately by legality. The final three words "legal tender everywhere" initially dissipate the first two lines that are almost raunchy in their puritanical lunge towards censorship. A joke presumably to belie the drama of the preceding lines, this is a juxtaposition of the bodily and perhaps the arcane spread of the opening. Legality suggests consequences and commerce, dispute and finality, and an attempt at resolution. It is a unifying notion that seems to serve as a silencer itself. The law, in its written capacity at least, is of course a theme, or better the source, of repeated moments of resolution in

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[332] Reznikoff, *The Poems*, 53.

Reznikoff's work as a whole. The texture of this final line leads back to an awareness of textuality that began with the carved stone of a warning, implying a commandment. Moses appears again but this time he is no longer in the bull rushes but on top of Mount Sinai receiving the Commandments carved on stone tablets. The fleeting image of the lawyer and money appear briefly, perhaps suggesting Shylock in the courtroom. But Reznikoff does not conclude the poem with an acute moment of money. As the last word, "Everywhere" is utterly transformative. In addition to the relatively proletarian connotations of the word, it evokes space and freedom to travel but also availability and frequency. It provides something of a syntactical and aural crash mat for the poem. The cadence is an exhalation of relief and ease but that isn't the key component.

The operation of "legal tender everywhere" is spreading and is in a sense muffling, the quality of the words themselves, when combined, has a softness. Also, the "legal tender" means of course money. Something about this formulation develops further on so money seems to mean paper, suggesting the paper that is written on. Documents, testimony and prose, perhaps even poetry, are evoked in the image of scattered paper everywhere, silent like snow. The transformation from the cold stone of "I charge you" to "tender everywhere" seems so quick a slip that it is hardly noticeable. Yet there is a development that is coherent and pervades the textuality of the poem, allowing it to freeze and thaw and freeze and thaw. This is the beginning of what I describe as the self-reflexive quality of Reznikoff, which is meant to describe a kind of perpetual movement, something like a rocking, an ebb and flow but one that glances off surfaces and keeps moving in the sense it is diverted yet forthright and, in Reznikoff's case, rather singular. It should be noted that this is not quite the perpetual motion Olson would later name Kinetics in his work on *Projective Verse*. The question that initiates and motivates the motion in this poem would seem to be a simple one, one that is often the first question we must ask of a poem: who is being addressed and who is doing the addressing? The speaker is essentially imploring himself to be guarded or careful with what he says, the position being that Silence is itself universally valuable, that is, similarly to money and time in a capitalist society. This resonates with Williams's ideas of economy in language and "ridding the verbiage" as Pound's imagist imperatives encourage the poet to "think in the manner of the scientist". Reznikoff fascinatingly makes the link between this stripped-back form of expression and financial value, cash and cache, for the modernist tendency to

refrain, to present rather than represent, to scrimp and save to increase value or solvency. There is an inherent sense that the very poem is balancing loss and gain, not in terms of being profitable but rather safe, an idea which passingly equates with the notion of paying for silence.

The overt economical moment here troubles ideas of artistic elitism, the privilege that the avant-garde both experiences and fosters. The speaker's concern for value exposes an awareness of cost and an awareness of or an anxiety about shortcomings, which might be read as a concern with poetic assimilation itself. The internal drama of assimilation as it is played out in Zukofsky's "Poem beginning 'The'" is present in this text. "I charge you," a diction of cost from the very beginning. The voice is internal but the body is fractured by anxiety about the trustworthiness of the tongue, the muscle of articulation is assuaged by teeth and lips that imprison it. Unlike Zukofsky, however, Reznikoff does not seem to present an overt aggressor, he is not so much defensive here as wry. By the same token Reznikoff does not baulk at assimilation and the pressures, thefts and woundings it represents. He seems to want to knowingly negotiate, as *A Fifth Group of Verse* and *Jerusalem the Golden* are less evidently hurt or taut than Zukofsky's text. Reznikoff's poetic negotiations of assimilation are perhaps more cautious and strategic.

The knowingness of the positioning of the poem, as the gatekeeper of the text, seems to be at least partially ironic. This is a book of poems that begins with the poem demanding silence of itself, counting its pennies and urging for thriftiness. Therefore, we can read using words economically. We can identify a sense of exile from the cultural ivory tower of first-generation, Poundian modernism. Mingled with this rather adorned decorative entrance hall is a sense of the medieval in the gargoyles, a meditative ironic study or patience of mind within the poem itself. It is a gaze that takes in the poem and its subject and delivers a self-consciousness that is typically Objectivist. This poem about poems is written over shifting fields of containment and expanse, performing its anxiety and aspiration as it does so. This duality of field engenders the "behaviour" of the poem itself as relentlessly self-aware, perhaps even wry. The wryness though provides an emotionality that specifically moves the poem away from Stein's hermetic works and equally renders Reznikoff's work here markedly different from the Zukofsky discussed earlier. Much cooler than "Poem Beginning 'The'", Reznikoff is measured, suggesting or provoking silence as the

response to the problem and the assumptions of bilingualism in terms of poetic assimilation.

Ian Davidson considers the multiplicity of language "braided" through Reznikoff's essentially monolingual work as an essay acknowledgment of Hebrew as the poet's soothing second language, but he also accounts for the language of law and the syntax of the salesman in Reznikoff's verse.[333] Davidson begins his essay with a brief focus on *Jerusalem the Golden* (1934), a text this chapter will look at in some detail that was published the same year as Oppen's solitary pre-fifties publication, *Discrete Series*. Davidson locates the syntactical disparity available to Reznikoff by identifying the language of the law and Yiddish as alternative languages he was fluent in as the starting point for the poet's own objective focus on the language of a poem:

> Reznikoff's interest is not, however in language in the abstract, but in his own use of language and the idea of a first language, and it is in problematizing the ways presence might be represented in Jewish American identities. […] is work as a writer, and the struggle he engaged with, was to examine the production of his own language in the process of writing about these things. His poetics involved not only an objective stance towards reality and a suspicion of the emotional responses of a lyrical "I," but also the way language could construct the object of the poem.[334]

The poem being examined here displays the "suspicion" of the lyrical "I" and seems to be concerned with "his own use of language". This begs the question, then, of who the lyrical "I" is because the poem seems to be knowingly addressing both of the facets Davidson points out. Such synchronicity occurs in the poem as something akin to a compromise. The earlier mentioned duality of field appears simultaneously with a direct address, the development of a simplistic image and the ubiquitous, indeed requisite, objectification of the poem itself. This multiplicity of operation or performance meets with the multiplicity of address between "I" and "You", and a reciprocity of readership develops. After all, the "you" is not the reader but the lips and teeth, prompting the question of why would the poem offer these body parts as rational for keeping closed? The address is rendered so oblique that the poem becomes an object made of words, perhaps because the poem, in its compromise

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[333] Reznikoff studied to be a lawyer but hardly practiced. He did, however, work for a number of years as a scribe/clerk in the courts. This is where he sourced his subjects and arguably his particular dispassionate tone for his work *Testimony*, a technique he applied to the transcripts of the Nuremberg Trials for his later work *Holocaust* (1975).

[334] Ian Davidson, "The Languages of Charles Reznikoff", *Journal of American Studies*, 45: 02, (May 2011), 360.

between balance and reciprocity within it, does not demand or plead with the reader. The compromise is the sense that the poem provides the reader with the above-mentioned disparity that characterizes the poem itself. Disparity suggests something of the observable because it provides space with which to once again address the issues of "truth" that have troubled this thesis. It colludes with ideas of "behaviour" and agency as opposed to meaning in such a way as to open out the discussion of Kindness to incorporate ideas of availability, disparity and "behavioural", reparative reading positions that will be discussed later in this chapter.

*Jerusalem The Golden* is a book of seventy-nine poems inscribed to Marie [Syrkin], who, by 1934, had been Reznikoff's wife four years. The textural canvas Reznikoff employs i.e. the materials, the substances and textures of the poems, are often the hard stones or the concrete of the city streets. The pavement and the road itself, Pound's *Metro*, resonates consistently throughout the collection. Leaves and fragments of rubbish replace Pound's "Petals" and the faces in the crowd take on dictions of untidiness and neatness. The sub-way equivalent to the "Metro" has at least six poems. The materials of the city often fascinate the poems, as asphalt and streetlamps are juxtaposed with urban trees and animals. Reznikoff writes the city into an almost bucolic but certainly mythical otherness of experience, at times reading as willfully childlike even ridiculous in their imaginative scope:

> What are you doing in our street among the automobiles,
> horse?
> How are your cousins, the centaur and the unicorn?[335]

This poem engages the poet's imagination in a way that is ostensibly rather trivial. It demonstrates it is a flight of fancy and we can see how it hinges on a questioning. This questioning is not solely the one directed at the horse! The simplistic, pedestrian nature of the first line suggests a perspective that looks up at the horse, while a communal rather than proprietary "our street" suggests a simplicity of gaze, an uncomplicated curiosity and a rather proletarian attitude to the urban space of the city itself. This trajectory then broadens rather sharply into an unassuming acceptance of fantastical creatures. What is at stake here is not the street or the horse, or the centaur or the unicorn, but the idea of potentiality in the poem itself. By aiming the steady gaze in the poem at the horse in the street and then inviting the idea of mythical

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[335] Reznikoff, *The Poems*, 101.

creatures, Reznikoff is admitting the potential for the poem itself, the very idea that the poem need not be mired in the now. One may well argue that in doing so the departure from the present represents a sort of ludicrous moment of farce, one that perhaps replicates the appearance of a horse among the cars. That is, the incongruity of the old amongst the new evokes the anachronistic nature of burgeoning modernity. Implicit in this poetic moment is also potential of the modern urban moment, the imaginative quality that silent observation will engender poetic communion with the urban moment.

## **Myth, Substance, and textuality in Kindness.**

This tendency of Reznikoff's to locate the mythic in the city runs throughout the book. These moments of the mythic, indeed Hellenic resonance, seem to represent what is counter to but not alien from the Hebraic and sketch out one strand of what we might consider Reznikoff's resolutions, indeed revolutions, in assimilation in his poetry. One of the most striking of these moments is found in the second poem of the text, "Hellenist":

> As I, barbarian, at last, although slowly, could read Greek,
> at "blue-eyed Athena"
> I greeted her picture that had long been on the wall:
> the head slightly bent forward under heavy helmet,
> as if to listen; the beautiful lips slightly scornful.[336]

A Pound reader may wonder is this "Athena" the poet's "Luini in porcelain"?[337] The cold, distant female figure of aspiration and anxiety, the glazed oval of the "MEDALLION", might suggest Athena's "heavy helmet". The focus on the eyes also recalls other sections of "Mauberley", such as "*Yeux Glaques*" for example. The first line of the poem labours along in its self-prescribed fashion, halting and determined,

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[336] Reznikoff, *The Poems*, 93.
[337] Or indeed if Reznikoff here makes reference to the famous poem by H. D. "Helen", "All Greece hates/ the still eyes in the white face,/ the luster as of olives/ where she stands,/ and the white hands.// All Greece reviles/ the wan face when she smiles,/ hating it deeper still/ when it grows wan and white,/ remembering past enchantments/ and past ills.// Greece sees unmoved,/ God's daughter, born of love,/ the beauty of cool feet/ and slenderest knees,/ could love indeed the maid,/ only if she were laid,/ white ash amid funereal cypresses." H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), *Collected Poems, 1912-1944,* ed. by Louis L. Martz (New York: New Directions, 1983), 154-155.

but the commas break the syllabic rhythm of the line. Two, then four, then two, then four, describing an ebb and flow, a breath that is an irregular struggle, perhaps almost animal in its rather dogged panting. The voice, the "I", is not the expiring aesthete Mauberley but rather the self-proclaimed "barbarian" sluggishly labouring to "read Greek". "Born/ In a half savage country," this persona would be able to struggle through to the Greek text from the Odyssey that Pound uses in the subsequent stanza of his poem but the persona would struggle to imbue the reading with requisite sanguineous confidence that the casting of Greek in the poem demands.[338] The poem seems to bridge at least two sentiments here, as the re-enactment of the struggle to "ascend" to educate oneself and the implications that this process has for one's sense of self are very much interrogated. So too is the malleability and very materiality of the surfaces of learning, in the book-learnt sense that has the texture of paper and replicas. Reznikoff's Athena is not after all Mauberley's supposed "La Columbina", nor is it a medallion, a hard, glazed object of adoration, contemplation and thus a crucible for aesthetic anxiety. Reznikoff's Athena seems pinned or painted to the wall, not floating cosmically before the poet. This emblem of the Hellenic ancients is far less grand and yet more substantial than an object, an emblem of the desirous urge that compels learning. Her image represents the reciprocal ambivalence that unites the poem as a whole. The physicality of the image of Athena, which is of course within the syntax of the poem, is clearly projected rather than indefinitely attributed, and so the object Athena represents is the object of learning, or rather the romantic manifestation of learning, a muse or a poster indeed.

The muse is Athena as Reznikoff mobilizes her and is present within the poem as a reproduced image, as paper rather than marble, which directly addresses the idea of textuality and materiality that both Oppen and Reznikoff address as second-wave modernists. Athena appears on paper here because of the laboured, classroom-like build-up to her appearance, since the implied surroundings closely resemble are a study or a classroom. She appears specifically as read, located in inverted commas, thus making her inserted into the poem in a specifically literary sense, she is read as her name is quoted. Apart from anything else, this isolates the figure rhythmically, therefore, reinforcing the laboured aesthetic of the first line. The paper, poster quality of my reading derives form the idea she is studied in an impoverished sense, hence

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[338] Pound, *Personæ*, 185.

the student identifies him/herself as "barbarian". At her appearance, the poem is subsumed by her appearance. Desire and the desirous urge to learn combine and the image, as it articulates aspiration, seems like it must specifically be a replica in a scholastic classroom, a poster on the wall as she is not simply *in* the poem as the goddesses are in Pound and even Williams. In this instance, Reznikoff poetically articulates the distended and perhaps even papery textures that he as an urban, first-generation immigrant Jewish modernist poet has with the constellation of references and learning that is so abundant and implicit in High Eurocentric Modernism itself. Fredman observes that "in marked distinction to his Imagist predecessors, Reznikoff had to purchase classicism at a high price and was never assured of retaining its possession".[339] The textures and the substances of Reznikoff's modernism take on a proletarian theme, as he plants imagistic modernisms in the sidewalks of New York. It is the papery, imported, and sometimes replica quality that motivates this reading, similar to how *Mauberley* derides the "Pages of Reinach" and the "mould in plaster".[340]

To some extent, paper itself represents ignorance in "Mauberley" as evidence of that which is not truly experienced or felt. The textuality of paper and the printed word is in one sense central to the trio of Objectivists discussed in this argument. Zukofsky, after all, begins "Poem beginning 'The'" with Chaucer and a litany of printed modernists. There is something about access implicit in assimilation and Reznikoff and Zukofsky begin their works with access that is not only textual but also printed. In the same vein, Oppen begins with a heroine on paper; Maude Blessingbourne. The Henry James story that she is from names her Maud with no *e*. Significantly, Oppen's muse is an American character not a goddess from antiquity, so her existence is confined to print since there are no definitive representations in marble that demand to be seen in order for this figure be known. Maud Blessingbourne, of the story, provides an at least partially egalitarian goddess beset by woe and too much thinking, a fitting description for many of Henry James's American heroines in Europe or at home. Oppen begins *Discrete Series* (1934) with a reference to and a quotation from a short-story by James entitled "The Story In It" that first appeared in the collection *The Better Sort* (1903):

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[339] Fredman, *A Menorah for Athena*, 5.
[340] Pound, *Personæ,* 186.

The knowledge not of sorrow, you were,
      saying, bit of boredom
Is—aside from reading speaking
      smoking——
Of what, Maude Blessingbourne it was,
      wished to know when, having risen,
"approached the window as if to see
      what was really going on";[341]

There is something almost Russian doll like about how these titles of Oppen's and James's fit together. They demonstrate something of a fragmented narrative, as Oppen reads *The Better Sort* by Henry James he reads "The Story In It" and writes his *Discrete Series*. This urge to narrativise is engendered by the almost deictic formulation of James's titles. Deixis in Oppen's work is investigated in a phenomenological sense by Paul Naylor, whose analysis of Oppen's *Of Being Numerous* is equally applicable to *Discrete Series* as he:

> suggest[s] that he [Oppen] uses both devices [deitic pronouns and prepositional phrases] to locate or position that which is neither an object nor an entity […] Oppen's ambiguous and equivocal language tends to push ontological questions into the foreground.[342]

The imagined deictic buildup to the first poem of *Discrete Series* is somewhat confirmed by the inclusion of the James story in the text. Oppen's poem does not, however, begin with a deictic pronoun but rather a deictic situation. It appears to begin *in medias res*, that is, in terms of deixis, the evident moment is already in motion in James's text. This strange materiality of the text itself seems to immediately displace the reader, while locating the text in another text and offering that which is simultaneously substantial and yet removed, which is similar but not identical to Zukofsky's relentless voice-throwing in "Poem beginning 'The'". There is, in the poem a sense of exile in Maude's rising as she moves to the window to discover an objective correlative in the weather. It is an expression of exile from expression itself. This intertextuality, the substance of removal, allows the poem to seemingly be *about* something. However, the rather ponderous openness of the verse and the *in medias res* beginning invite the reader to "approach the window" him/herself.

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[341] George Oppen, *The Collected Poems of George Oppen* (New York: New Directions, 1975), 3.
[342] Paul Kenneth Naylor, "The Pre-Position "Of": Being, Seeing, and Knowing in George Oppen's Poetry", in *Contemporary Literature*, 32: 1 (Spring, 1991), 102.

Because the poem begins with "The knowledge", it could be argued that it begins with the epistemological before moving on, "not of sorrow, you were saying, but of boredom", toward the phenomenological and the ontological. Oppen echoes James's negotiation of the discourse by involving other texts in his own primary trajectory. That is, as Maud (in James's text) discusses her relationship with literature, James presents a bluntly inter-textual moment. When Oppen presents Maude's rise from the sofa, he engages James's intertextuality by layering it upon his own. This is a sort of poetic, narrative method by which to bring the disparity between feeling and reading to the fore, the pursuit that reading itself engenders. More than simply collage, Oppen presents a fracture of the conditions of engagement with a text. This fracture is exemplified in the deictic spirit of all the poems in *Discrete Series*. By apparently omitting moments of syntax from the phrasing of the poems, this substance of removal creates an open-ended moment of reading itself where the deictic is not didactic and obviously not hermetic. These poems, or moments, look like and are fragments but not in the Poundian sense. Oppen frames the poems in *Discrete Series* with the reader's own agency. They begin, in passing, with or without the reader and are not waiting to be read. They simply begin and, therefore, make far fewer demands on the reader. The "behaviour" of the poem represents what the poem is concerned with, presenting a passive opportunity for perception as he emphasizes the importance that the image is 'encountered'. This is distinct from "sincerity" and an understanding of the poem as an object because it hinges upon the idea that the poem itself is the agent or performer rather than just the stage.

Oppen selects "The Story In It" because it functions in some senses as an illuminating companion in terms of content to *Discrete Series*. As well as the wash of ennui that James's narrative lends the poem, further moments of significance are enacted in the short story.[343]   The Maud Blessingbourne of the story, not to be confused with the Maud*e* of Oppen's poem, is interrogated by her friend about her choice of diversionary reading, which is almost always a French novel, and she explains how "I seem with it to get more of the real thing — to get more life for my

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[343] We might momentarily consider the parallels between Oppen's Jamesian Maud*e* who "approached the window as if to see…" and perhaps literature's most famous *Maud* by Tennyson. May there be some correspondence to Oppen's Maude rising and the Laureate's famous inducement from section XXI "Come into the garden, Maud"?  Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Maud, and other poems* (London: Edward Moxon, 1855), 67.

money".[344]   Maud's notion of "the real thing" is significant because it echoes the imperative from Pound regarding authenticity of substance, which he acquired from French modern novelists such as Flaubert in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley". This establishes the idea that the authentic exists and that it can be accessed through a sincerity verging on the scientific. This contention is at stake in assimilationist texts as much as it is in second-wave American modernist texts, which highlights the Objectivist urge to level the elitism supporting binaries of authenticity. Maud continues to explain that she reads these French novels so voraciously because she is "looking, more than anything else, for a decent woman":

> "Oh then, you mustn't look for her in pictures of passion. That's not her element nor her whereabouts."
> Mrs. Blessingbourne weighed the objection. "Doesn't it depend on what you mean by passion?"
> "I think one can only mean one thing: the enemy to behaviour."
> "Oh, I can imagine passions that are, on the contrary, friends to it."
> Her interlocutor thought. "Doesn't it depend perhaps on what you mean by behaviour?"
> "Dear no. Behaviour is just behaviour — the most definite thing in the world."[345]

This conversation reveals a duality otherwise bubbling just beneath Objectivism itself and questions whether or not passion is the enemy of "behaviour". Does it then follow that "behaviour" is the most definite thing in the world? If so, the notion of "the real thing" becomes compromised or rather the difference between a fictive, literary "real thing" is drawn into clear distinction against the "real" regarding human "behaviour". The distinction, consequently, is between real writing and "behaviour", both of which are performative constructs. This explains why I search for "behaviour" in poetry as a means of discerning Kindness, since "behaviour" describes an accepted idea of reality as it is physical, evident and human rather than just a efficacious "reality" in a text that is evidently not "real" as its "reality" is subject to the expectation of the reader. These formulations as wrought by James in a fictitious conversation about literature do something with the notion of "behaviour" that speaks very definitely to how I read the rather disparate Objectivists in this chapter. Behaviour here means specifically not acting on or articulating passions, "silence is legal tender everywhere."

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[344] Henry James, *The Better Sort* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), 176.
[345] James, 179.

The term "behaviour" is crucial throughout this argument as a descriptive means for reading "vibrant singularity" from reparative positions. It has been used so far in terms of the "behaviour" of a poem to discuss agency rather than meaning. On this occasion, however, it seems to be meaning not only as arbiter but as dictator. James is using a sense of "behaviour" that relates to a kind of late Victorian social propriety, which can be linked to the Objectivist notion of sincerity where the "behaviour" of a poem can be read as the arbiter and dictator of sincerity. One of the reasons this notion might be persuasive is that "behaviour" represents some sort of control in both senses, the exercise of a sense of sublime reservedness when passion is at stake. As the Objectivists conflate poetic sincerity with a sense of morality in the poem as object, so too does (James's) Maud Blessingbourne. The relationship between passion and "behaviour" is reciprocal and beneficial, as Maud claims, "Behaviour is just behaviour". One might argue that equally the poem, in the Objectivist capacity, is just the poem and its performance is essentially "behaviour". The Objectivist poem as an object itself develops from a reciprocal relationship between, on the one hand, emotional passion and/as inspiration, and, on the other hand, "behaviour", as sincere and morally agreed upon conduct.

The next crucial distinction is that I am not suggesting the Objectivist discourse or ideology is one of repression, in terms of "behaviour", but rather one that aims to communicate and engage simply and with clarity. The narrative of "The Story In It" in fact hinges upon an unarticulated passion, where the silencing of the passion constitutes the passion therein. This is not austerity but internal compromise with a benefit of inherent sincerity and outward perfectibility: "Behaviour is just behaviour". The poem, consequently, is a unit and its "behaviour" represents the agency of reading that is the "actant" in Bennett's sense. However, the question remains: how can we locate Kindness in this formulation? Kindness can be found in what is agreed upon, that is, what is evident rather than declared, and in the sense of pervading compromise within the poem itself as that compromise is extended to the reader. The compromise resolves the disparity inherent in *meaning* and engages availability. That is, poetic surfaces have *meaning* but are specifically permeable or penetrable. In this sense, the communication remains Kind as the potential for understanding is further exposed and simultaneously rendered sincere by the necessary self-consciousness of a poem's "behaviour". This may be an anthropomorphic projection on to a poem towards a reading of sharing and, by extension, towards Kindness, but the application

of "sincerity" to a poem rather than the attribution of "truth" also has this effect. The anthropomorphism of Reznikoff's, therefore, gives the poem itself "lips", "teeth" and "tongue" and not only blends the reader, the voice and the poem but also requests that the poem behaves, that it show restraint and be "tender everywhere". As James explains, "What their silence was charged with, therefore, was not only a sense of the weather, but a sense, so to speak, of its own nature".[346]

Another passing moment of contact or connection between James's short story and the poets in this chapter can be found in the former's description of the somewhat dastardly Colonel Voyt:

> he looked, as was usually said, un-English. His black hair cropped close, was lightly powdered with silver, and his dense glossy beard, that of an emir or a caliph, and grown for civil reasons, repeated its handsome colour and its somewhat foreign effect. His nose had a strong and shapely arch, and the dark grey of his eyes was tinted with blue. It had been said of him —in relation to these signs—that he would have struck you as a Jew had he not, in spite of his nose, struck you so much as an Irishman.[347]

This troubling suspicion of Judaism is a subject much more directly engaged with in Zukofsky's poem from the previous chapter. However, it is interesting to note that the James story Oppen uses here features a man who looks Jewish and yet is not. The heightened notion of the visibility of Jewishness as remarkable, physical and stereotypically manifest in "The Story in it" seems to imply an exoticism and inscribe an otherness about Jewishness. There is a nagging sense of assimilation here, since Oppen's *Discrete Series* does not address assimilation directly while Reznikoff's *Jerusalem the Golden* is composed of explicitly cross-cultural references and moments. However, the "hero" of James's story "would have struck you as a Jew" and this awareness of the "discerning" Gentile gaze is, while very much at stake in Zukofsky, operating differently in Oppen and Reznikoff. This awareness or sense of conspicuous otherness is comparable to the notions of textual learning discussed earlier. The significance being that this learning is about the apprehension rather than the entitlement to the Christian, Hellenic tradition of "culture" in itself as a subject. That is, the experience of learning is central to the identity of the poem, as opposed to Pound, where knowledge is taken for granted.

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[346] James, 169.
[347] James, 172.

The positioning of this argument must necessarily shift for Oppen because if these poems address assimilation, they also address distance, replication, learning, and anxiety about the recognition of difference. The motivation, therefore, is not to obscure but to be clear about identity as a condition from which one's understanding develops, i.e. the condition of difference and the condition of learning that in some respects amount to implicit assimilation which is exile. That is, a self-conscious awareness of the perspective of a reader or viewer as opposed to the omniscience of the entitled, white, Hellenic writer is exemplified in Pound. A figurative outsideness the poet shares with the reader rather than empathy means the poem is definitively an object and is read in exile. The imperative is to confess and to declare the self, before forming the poem as emblematic of that declaration and yet not solely about it. The idea of "behaviour" comes into play again because it is possible that a poem would "str[ike] you as a Jew[ish] poem", to paraphrase James. This idea can be seen mobilizing and motivating the text in various ways. While this assimilationist point of comparison is not the main focus of this chapter, it presents a reading of the stylistics of Oppen and Reznikoff as a means to further interrogate and establish Kindness in poetry. The apparent openness of Reznikoff's verse, when read beside the oblique gaze of Oppen's, provides further grounds for discussing the terms of a grammar of Kindness with a view to considering the objective exchange as a formula for reading, which represents the reparative position engaged in moments of "vibrant singularity".

One might argue that the quality of openness identified in Reznikoff and Oppen, can be read in direct correlation to Stein's hermetic, enclosed style. With these two poets, the urge is toward transparency rather than defense because sincerity does not mask because it is motivated by vulnerability. This idea is subtle and nuanced yet different for each writer. Transparency and sincerity have something but the transparency in Reznikoff's work, for example, differs significantly from that in Pound's. Not only is there the poetic imperative to present but also, crucially, the need not to misrepresent, an anxiety that does not occur in Pound. In Reznikoff's and Oppen's transparency there is stillness and a sensitivity of gaze as the poet, or rather the voice of the poem, seems to sympathize with the poem in its condition as an object. A speaking object is in contrast to Pound's poems, which seem to embody potential speech in their condition as images. The Objectivist poem, however, speaks from the object it is. Tangibility and intangibility meet here in speech and object. The objectification of the poem renders it, for this reading at least, "behavioural". Agency

is tangible and yet intangible in that actions reflect will. In a similar sense, we can read Kindness as reflecting a will to share within the poem, to allow the reader to be complicit. Susan Thackrey describes Oppen as having written "a poetics that can be radically trusted".[348] This is a fascinating observation because it seems to conceive of the poem as an object and ascribes a morality to it that extends an agency to the poem itself because it goes beyond the premise of sincerity itself. It suggests a proximity within the poem itself that renders it secure. Consequently, the readerly experience becomes open also. The poetic trustworthiness, or the solidity of the poem-object, creates a reading that is instinctively "behavioural" and responsive as Kindness is in poems.

## Kindness and Americana in *Discrete Series.*

A close reading of the middle section of *Discrete Series* here will develop into a narrativisation of the section in order to discuss the work as it offers an interdependent progression of poems, as the title indicates. This reading focuses loosely on what might be called the Americana aspects of the texts. Americana appears here to describe the same sense that Williams constructs with idiom, which has fed and been fed by home-grown American, first-wave modernist texts by Steiglitz, Demuth, Sheeler and O'Keeffe, and subject matter before discussing how Oppen renegotiates it this populist persuasion. Tom Sharp points out the destructive effect anthologizing *Discrete Series* into *Collected Poems* has as it removed each poem from the individual leaf upon which it first appeared and arranges them over far fewer far fuller pages.[349] Sharp uses the arrangement of the pages in the original publication to number the poems as they appear in *Discrete Series*. In the *Collected Poems* at the top of page eight the first titled poem of the series appears, "Party on Shipboard" this is poem number 11, it is followed by poem number 12:

> This land:
> The hills, round under straw;

[348] Susan Thackrey, *George Oppen: A Radical Practice* (Oakland, C A: O Books; San Francisco:  The Poetry Center & American Poetry Archives, 2001), 11.

[349] Tom Sharp, "George Oppen, Discrete Series" in, *George Oppen: Man and Poet*, ed. by Burton Hatlen (Orono, Me: National Poetry Foundation, 1981), 271-293, 288.

A house

With rigid trees

And flaunts
A family laundry,
And the glass of windows[350]

The poem seems to resonate with Williams's "Red wheelbarrow" from *Spring and All*:

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens[351]

The commerce between these two poems is, on the one hand, bold and evident and, on the other hand, infinitesimal and extremely tense. Has Oppen reduced Williams's crucial "depends" to a colon? Can the logical consequence or the descriptive enumeration that Williams's poem is so remarkable for and contingent upon be so flattened here in Oppen? The gesture is almost a reversal of Williams's. "This Land" is the silent yet grandiose moment in Williams's poem that is implicit in the "so much" of its opening, yet it retains something of Williams' moment too.

The largesse of Oppen's first line seems to mirror Williams's but in a less oblique way. Rather than a discretely expansive utterance, Oppen presents a clipped yet vast moment of comprehension. The body of the poem itself has moments of resonance with the "red wheel barrow" as the whiteness of the "family laundry", suggesting sheets or linens, meets the "chickens". The yard subsumed in the Williams text is once again implicit in Oppen's. One might even argue about the economic decline of the absent poetic family in Oppen's having lost their chickens and their wheelbarrow since it is the Depression after all. This observation brings Williams's

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[350] Oppen, *Collected Poems*, 8.
[351] Williams, *Imaginations*, 138.

poem back into play and validates the contingency central to the poem because "This Land" depends upon those chickens and the wheelbarrow. Oppen here suggests that the "land" depends on these. "The hills;" might indeed recall John Winthrop, not to mention the virile hostility of "rigid trees". "And flaunts/A family laundry" is not a family's laundry but is the emblematic yet quotidian symbol of a unit that reproduces, works, cleans itself and remains a unit, since "A family laundry" is not possessive. Unless this line refers to a business and is a family laundry business, in which case why are the "hills, round under straw". This query also perplexed Pound in fact leading Oppen on Feb 9 1934, to respond to Pound's question on it, "'The glass of windows and a family laundry"—Yes, I mean laundry on a line. Are there any installed tubs in these parts?"[352]  However, the shift in economic status is not nearly as significant as the poetic drift the poem itself engenders.

The opening of Oppen's poem feels grand and declarative, a tone that reverberates throughout the poem as bold nouns build a scene. The simplicity, in the sense that it is subject of the poem, is built, indeed it grows, like a "house" or like "trees." Rather than the tension that stretched though the Williams poem, this poem subsists on a profoundly physical sensuality. The poem in another sense offers a landscape that locates its vitality not in the seething observance and frank tension of "Red Wheel Barrow" but in the physicality of the scene itself. The Roundness of the hills perhaps suggest the female form and the phallic rigidity of the trees meet in a notion of "flaunting". This poem, however, is passingly anthropomorphic although not in the same way that the earlier Reznikoff is. Land itself is essentially procreation here, both symbolizing abundance and enveloping the man-made. In its sturdy, foundational tone, there is also an interrogation of the possession of a house on a hill, as virility and masculinity are studied with caution.

The central line of the poem is phallic to say the least. "With rigid trees" is an almost deictic line, the "with" suggesting this fragment should function as that which might follow a verb, an adjective for a noun or indeed the description of a method. In this sense, there is the suggestion of poetic or literal action calling into the poem in the physical presence of the trees themselves. "Trees" are planted, have roots and grow. They hide or protect, and burns or builds in the poem seems to stake a particular claim. Nature itself is planted in this moment disturbing the bucolic house

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[352] Oppen, *Selected Letters*, 4.

on straw hills as it is too wild. "Rigidity" and the rough width of trunks combined with the notion of height allow the trees in the poem to function similarly to the tree as it is considered a bold stroke or line that pushes through the middle of the poem. Not, however, bisecting the poem as I discussed in the work on Williams's poem from *Spring and All* about an old woman dying. An encroaching physicality approaches the visceral in a far thicker sense than the tension in the Williams poem that also performs the visceral. This is Kindness in a visceral sense of poetic performance. The intrusion of the phallus into the poem echoes the intrusive phallus of the trees themselves, where synthesis and invitation are initiated by the "behaviour" of the poem. Once again, the self-reflexivity discussed earlier in terms of Reznikoff emerges and we can consider the poem as an independent unit deriving its agency from responding to itself and hence we can discern "behaviour". The agency of the poem performs the task of *knowing* in the vibrant sense I developed from Bennett, that is, the "behaviour" of the poem permits its action, which has "approached the window as if to see what was really going on".[353]

It is necessary to make a further comparison between Oppen and Williams here since the former enacts the dependence in the latter's poem with a colon, meaning both poems identify a tipping-point of unspeakable tension, that which depends as it is composed of or contingent upon it. While Williams uses his pared down style to frame a scene to suggest the interior gaze out to the enclosed yard, Oppen approaches the moment of tension from the exterior, as I have argued suggest the interior gaze out to the enclosed yard, Oppen approaches the moment of tension from the exterior looking in as the poem ends with "windows". However, this scale or trajectory is essential to the comparative moment, wherein lies an absolutely crucial opportunity to discuss Kindness. The comparison between Oppen and Williams helps prove that "behaviour" is *not* meaning, a crucial distinction for determining what a poem's "behaviour" actually is and how it provides an "actant" of reading. When the reduced gesture of Williams's "depends" and the further reduced gesture of Oppen's colon are analyzed together and the poetical similarities are considers, two moments revealing the poems' "behaviour" become apparent. This is because we are looking at "things" that are specifically contingent, making it important to note that the

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[353] James, 169. Naylor makes a study of Oppen's use and dialogue with the Heideggerian notion of "approach" as that which precedes being. This reading develops into a discourse on what Naylor consider to be the ontological project of "being" in Oppen's poetic.

legitimate notion of "behaviour" here is not in the subjects or the gesture but in the gesture of contingency itself. Action, in this case, denotes "behaviour" and this readerly action must essentially be an exchange because when the poem carries an exchange within it or a moment of self-consciousness, fallibility or other specific artifice, there is a point of readerly access. This access engages the reader in an act of reading not as an act of understanding content but of understanding the poem itself, its "behaviour" during the "actant" of reading in its "vibrant singularity". The poem is a unit because it is so sensitive to its own construction, its self-consciousness engendering a kind of porous sort of presentation.[354] Surfaces need not gleam since it is this Kindness that projects the potential to know. Crucially, this is not only a question of punctuation, it is not simply a question of the gap.

## **"Behaviour" and form in Oppen and Reznikoff.**

If Kindness is predicated on a "grammar of reading" that observes the "behaviour" of a poem, it is not solely rooted in "meaning" (syntax and subject) or in its punctuation, the temptation is to argue that it is something akin to form, the overall effect of the poem. Therefore, it is important to re-examine this distinction between "behaviour" and form in order to find Kindness because it is the most difficult and crucial one to make. The distinction has been mediated primarily through a discourse on reading in exile; as I have demonstrated how reparative readings function when informed by Sedgwick and the notions of "singularity" and "vibrancy" as theorized by Attridge and Bennett respectively. The instances of synthesis identified throughout this analysis are best understood as triggers for finding Kindness. This proposal has developed from an understanding of the "meaning" of a poem and the *way* in which it performs or corresponds to it, which is essentially form itself and can be understood as a perspective on both first and second-generation modernist concepts of sincerity. New Critics generally understood this phenomenon and developed synthesis within a poem in order to create a similar synthesis between the poem and the reader although

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[354] Michael Heller describes "syntactical and denominative porosity" in *Discrete Series* as part of his discussion on what he considers to be Oppen's complex attempt at reconciling his Marxist views and poetic ambition/urge in the early 1930s. Heller, "Objectivists in the Thirties", in *The Objectivist Nexus*, ed. by DuPlessis and Quartermain, 152.

the issue has always resulted in discussions of form. Synthesis stems from a poetic understanding of form as something that is both a construction and the poem as a whole. From this perspective, the question of a poem as anything other than the sum of its parts is solved by the idea of form. Williams wrote to Kay Boyle in 1932, insisting that "it doesn't even mean enough to create form" before concluding that "Poetry is creation of new form".[355]

Form is best understood as a kind of sculptural condition of a poem in that the manipulated mass of substance is moved through punctuation and word choice, line breaks, alliteration assonance, dissonance and the rest of the machinations of the poetic. It is therefore vital to note that "behaviour" is distinct from form because the former is developed as a means by which to counter New Critical formalism and the philosophical notions of language attendant upon approaching the poem as ethical objects or adopting new-historical or cultural considerations of modernist poetics. "Behaviour" is always in exile from these positions, it looks in but it does not enter. It is "behavioural" assimilation to a hierarchical culture that establishes and professionalizes modes of reading and value to the exclusion of others. The "grammar" that Kindness offers is a space and means by which to read and value the experience of reading itself, to get pleasure from it and to, perhaps most importantly, value the object being read.

"Behaviour" is what is read after form has been established. The "behaviour" of a poem is discerned or judged upon reading rather than writing as it is an idea that describes the excess of the poem itself, that which more than the sum of its parts is. Achieved by form but resolutely not form itself, the "behaviour" of the poem encapsulates the agency a piece of poetry has as a unit, the points at which reading transcends understandings of construction, meaning and form. It is not effect but is something more residual, such as the sweat of language that has worked. This metaphor redresses Cleanth Brooks's assertions regarding the "paradox" as foundational in poetry, thus setting up that which he calls "unity" of paradox which is the root of "good" poetry.[356] He explains that "the unity is not a unity of the sort to be achieved by the reduction and simplification appropriate to an algebraic formula. It is

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[355] William Carlos Williams, *The Selected Letters of William Carlos Williams,* ed. and intro by John C. Thirlwall (New York: McDowell, Obolensky, 1957), 130; 134.

[356] Ruth Jennison, discusses the role of parataxis as central to the Objectivist strategy. While not exactly paradox, Jennison brings the New Critical formal mode of assessment forward and considers it in terms of contemporary thought on culture and historicism. "Parataxis (…) is the formal deployment of radical agency, wherein discrete particulars are placed side by side…" Jennison, 3.

a positive unity, not a negative; it represents not a residue but an achieved harmony".[357] Brooks goes on to state that a poem in its "essential structure" most closely "resembles that of a play […] The dynamic nature of drama, in short, allows us to regard it as *an action* rather than as a formula for action or as a statement about action".[358] These two assertions by Brooks can be combined to propose that the "behaviour" of the poem can only be ascertained by considering the residual qualities of the poem as a whole. Residual here represents something akin to sweat, fingerprints or other evidence of human presence. As Woods highlights, "Oppen's poetry shifts uneasily between a poetics of presence and a poetics of the *trace*".[359] The residual is not spectral but evident in subtle ways, not articulated but clear as the language remains organized or disorganized in such a way as to clarify its moment of organization, its "behaviour".

This notion of sweat corresponds in part with Brooks's assertions about the poem as "action". It also provokes questions about the poem as work. In "Objectivists in the Thirties", Michael Heller argues that:

> *Discrete Series* is less a poem about avant-garde technique or even about "making it new" than it is a desperate cry in the poetic-political wilderness over insufficient means and, given Oppen's politics, the ultimate insufficiencies of his own poetry to enact social change or offer hope. […] The "cry" of the poem, its resolving trope, is the voicing of its own inability to conform to the hegemonies of the Marxist thinking of the thirties.[360]

Cautious as I am to avoid Marxist readings of the labour relations implied by the colon in Oppen's text, a considerable amount of research has been produced that discusses the politics central to and investigated through the work of the Objectivist poets, in particular Oppen (i.e. Woods, Heller and Homberger). "*Karl Marx*" even concludes Reznikoff's *Jerusalem the Golden*, which Homberger interprets as an example of Reznikoff contrasting "the remote God of Spinoza with the humane, secularized Judaism of Karl Marx".[361] There are addition political implications to Reznikoff's inclusion of Marx, as he concludes the poem with a quote from the

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[357] Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn. Studies in the structure of poetry [with a portrait]* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1947), 179.

[358] Brooks, 186-187.

[359] Woods, 219.

[360] Heller, "Objectivists in the Thirties", in *The Objectivist Nexus,* ed. by DuPlessis and Quartermain, 153.

[361] Eric Homberger, "Communists and Objectivists", in *The Objectivist Nexus*, ed. by DuPlessis and Quartermain, 107-126, 125.

socialist thinker, "From each according to his strength,/to each according to his need".[362] Reznikoff's use of the word "strength" here is at least partially troubling. The accepted translation of Marx's famous phrase reads "from each according to his *ability*, to each according to his needs".[363] However, Reznikoff's "strength" resonates more thoroughly with the internal rhymes and alliterations of the preceding line:

> Proclaim to the seed of man
> throughout the length and breadth of the continents,
> From each according to his strength,
> to each according to his need.[364]

The trio of words in these two lines, "length", "breadth" and "strength", link them together aesthetically and orally. However, it seems highly unlikely that Reznikoff, whose dedication to transcription was so assiduous that it led to entire books based on the practice, would alter Marx's famous maxim for solely aesthetic purposes. This raises the question: how can the poet supplant "strength" for "ability" in a Marxist context and not be aware of the political implications of the difference between these two words not to mention the poetic difference? This circles back to the earlier discussion of the difference between form and "behaviour" since if the decision to switch "strength" for "ability" was a formal, aesthetic decision then that surely has some implications for the poem as a whole. It can be argued that these implications arise because a notion of "behaviour" begins in reading Kindness. Rather conversely, "Strength" weakens Marx's phrase, it compromises and complicates the maxim itself, thereby complicating the relationship that the poem has with its own title, "*Karl Marx*". The political nuance of "strength" as force and power ultimately dismantles the maxim itself, a shift that cannot merely be a form concession. Part of what is so significant about Reznikoff's oeuvre is his commitment to the precise word itself, which includes his verbatim reproductions in *Testimony* and *Holocaust*. As this poem syntactically deviates from its origin in an apparent effort to retain a certain poetic flow or form, it performs a deviation from its nexus in a more ideological sense. As a result, poetic conformity enacts political nonconformity, noticing always how are

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[362] Reznikoff, *The Poems*, 115.
[363] Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme: With Appendices by Marx, Engels and Lenin* (London: M. Lawrence, 1933), 14. (my emphasis)
[364] Reznikoff, *The Poems,* 115.

specifically rooted in *form* itself, as is per*form*, a crucial theoretical idea in this analysis.

"Behaviour" can be effectively discussed in terms of conformity and nonconformity to some extent since "behavioural" conformity is a question of agreed-upon modes and codes followed by an individual or a group. Synchronicity in form, one might argue, evinces a sort of conformity that engenders the preliminary extent of the idea of the "behaviour" of a poem. This is not to suggest that the idea of "behaviour" is only satisfied by something akin to conformity but rather that nonconformity is "behavioural" in equal measure. As Reznikoff and Oppen, demonstrate, there are examples of conformity and non-conformity behaving in equal measure. This notion of "behaviour", consequently, becomes radically self-conscious because it is implicitly contingent on the objectivist notion of the poem as an object. That is, because the poems inherently negotiate their own poetic-ness, they are acutely self-reflexive. The poems speak to and within themselves rather than evincing the primacy of self-awareness. This foregrounds a significant distinction between self-awareness and self-consciousness in the poem's positioning and posture, in its "behaviour", which can be found in Williams and most certainly in Pound.[365]

To discuss this distinction, it is necessary to compare an Oppen poem with an example from Pound's "Alba" discussed in the first chapter:

> As cool as the pale wet leaves
>        of lily-of-the-valley
> She lay beside me in the dawn.[366]

Oppen's text is number 16 from *Discrete Series*:

> She lies, hip high,
> On a flat bed
> While the after-
> Sun passes.
>
> Plant, I breathe——
>       O Clearly,
> Eyes legs arms hands fingers,
> Simple legs in silk.[367]

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[365]This recalls Cary Nelson's assertions about Pound's "totalizing paranoia". Cary Nelson, *Repression and Recovery: Modern American poetry and the politics of cultural memory, 1910-1945* (Madison; London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 176.

[366] Pound, *Personæ*, 111.

Pound's poem provides a wonderful moment of synchronicity and cohesion as the image is entirely self-reflective. The object mirrors the object metaphor so there is no departure, only the instant of the moment. Considering Oppen's poem in contrast, the reader might question how self-reflection is operating in both poems since both share a similar subject and include common imagery. While there are numerous important differences between the two that extend beyond the poetic into the political, social, sexual and philosophical, and which affect the relationships within the poems themselves, the most important difference does not rely on the presupposition that Pound was a misogynist and that Oppen was a devoted husband. The most important difference is that both poems engage in something that can be considered behaviour and, therefore, demonstrate "vibrant singularity" although approached from different angles. The poems might behave differently but they both behave as independent units of agency. Oppen's poem is markedly different from Pound's in numerous essential ways, the most immediately apparent being the ordering of the central image itself. Oppen's poem begins with the female "She lies" and immediately positions the gaze of the poem as if, not quite below, at least level with the woman in the frame. The phrase "hip high" in its percussive clarity suggests the body, as the description offered does not look down to some dewy, trembling, white petals for its qualities as Pound's poem does. There is a sense of strength or reinforcement in the body as it appears here in reference to itself. While Pound's figure lambently lies "beside" the voice of the poem, in Oppen's the figure is more passively observed. However, the passivity of the gaze is not transferred to the figure. The fragmentary passing of time and the quiet respiration of the "Plant, I", which recalls the troublesome conflation that begins Zukofsky's "The", soothes the poem so that when the final rush of features appears it is as though they are painted rapidly and with great vigor onto a clear canvas, "a flat bed". In this sense, the body is on the bed, its presence is more active than the poem itself. Woods's reading of a later Oppen poem, "Parousia", is equally applicable here:

> There is no incorporating subject here, and there is a marked lack of possessiveness. The poem resorts to images of sensual perception rather than a

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367 Oppen, *Collected Poems*, 9.

rational understanding, as the poetry appears to hold out an aesthetic resistance to rationalized society.[368]

Woods's point about possession is particularly relevant to this poem, as the relationship between the subject and the poem is drawn into quite extreme relief. Physicality is, in a sense, enacted in this poem using bold nouns to build images, such as "Eyes legs arms hands fingers" where no commas disrupt the list. This reinforces Charles Altieri's argument that in Objectivist poetics "collage construction enables images to become a form of thinking".[369] The body is not disrupted because the gaze is not disrupted. In this energetically fragmented presentation of the body, the sense of the whole is conveyed as well as the agency of the body and the rather awe-struck, rapid or hungry gaze. The inclination might be to think of the cubist tradition here. The swift run of features is not dissimilar to Picasso's or Stein's method of rendering forms with various elements brought to the front of the image so that looking attempts to resemble seeing.

While Pound objectifies the female subject in his poem, Oppen seems to make an objectified object around his female subject. In this sense, one might argue that Pound's poem is self-aware whereas Oppen's is self-conscious. The purpose of this comparison, however, is not to reveal the gender politics of the respective poems but rather to discern "behaviour" as distinct from form. An analysis of poem number 34 from Reznikoff's *Jerusalem the Golden* further substantiates this point. "After Rain" provides the largely nocturnal, lunar beginning of the collection, "The motor-cars on the shining street move in semicircles of spray,/ semicircles of spray".[370] This poem is Kind because the syntax and the rhythm combine and the subject and the sound unite as the poem performs itself. There is alliteration and a developed, musical onomatopoeia suggesting motion, sound and light in the poem. It performs varying levels of inscription as the tarmac shines wet as the wheels of the cars cross it. The sense of the repetition of this sound is delivered in the single repetition of the revolution of the wheels, "semicircles of spray,/ semicircles of spray". Whether it is an aural imagist poem or the objectivist object, it represents a moment that is not hermetic despite being cyclical and seemingly enclosed. Instead, it is a delightful web

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[368] Woods, 216.
[369] Charles Altieri, "The Objectivist Tradition", from *The Objectivist Nexus*, ed. by DuPlessis and Quartermain, 25-37, 32.
[370] Reznikoff, *The Poems*, 100.

of assonance. Its use of extended alliteration over the last six syllables of the poem engenders knowing, an understanding of a momentary but shared experience. It invites the reader to know its "behaviour" through its "vibrant singularity", thus making it Kind. Moreover, this poem is a useful site upon which to discuss the distinction between form and "behaviour", to extract one from the other and vice versa.

If the assonance, alliteration and rhythm of the poem make up its form then how can we attempt to read "behaviour" in this instance? "Behaviour" is not the impish quality the brief, effective and irreverent poem has, this is too cheap an idea. "Behaviour" functions here as a distinct development of form, i.e. "behaviour" is about form. The knowingness of the object (i.e. the sound that the wheels make) that the poem itself lends it (i.e. the poem is neither the object or about the object but instead sustains the object) implies the agency of Williams's "accidental shoulder". These objects are imbued with and sustained by the myriad attachments the reader has for his/her own personal experience. That isn't to say that "behaviour" is suggestibility; that is too vague. Rather, "behaviour" is the present operation of perspective, the vibrant epistemological nexus of recognition that is inherent in language itself. It is not declaratory yet is still present and these poems absorb this porosity or problematic and resolve them by presenting an object or moment that in its own drive and effort towards precision allows the reader to engage with the text with similar precision and security. The presence of "behaviour" in a poem that already attempts and/or succeeds "vibrant singularity" renders the final stroke of Kindness, it allows a moment of the human. This is in some sense a type of sensory sympathy rather than ideological confluence. Not "you know what I mean" but instead "you know what I know." In Kindness, this is a vital moment because it delivers the neophyte and the academic reader the same moment. As a glance of recognition, "behaviour" is present in the poem as object/event, as an independent unit of agency rather than a conduit for meaning, which corresponds with Pound's understanding of the Chinese ideogram's capacity to relate "*you* know what *I* know". This type of reading finds Kindness in readerly absorption in the poem not presence in the poem. The hardly imaginative bridging of the gap is not readerly absorption as a met glance, this is Kindness in poetry. It is simultaneously easy and difficult to locate this in these stark modernist poems, even though the idea is germane in "no ideas but in things" and "ridding the veribiage" as an ethos that extols looking.

However, the contrast of the aesthetic coolness of the poetic project belies the passionate gesture towards others that each poem presents. Perhaps by this token all poetry is kind but I would hastily argue to the contrary because I am still reading Kindness as a skill in poetry, or rather a talent in a poem itself, that is approaching something similar to grace, a certain presence and/or a prescience. If we can discuss the highly nuanced term "grace" in an atheistic, literary sense similar to how literature critics use Freud, something akin to what Zukofsky describes in the *Objectivist Anthology* is possible, something:

> distinct from print which records action and existence and incites the mind to further suggestion, there exists, tho it may not be harboured as solidity in the crook of an elbow writing (audibility in two-dimensional print) which is an object or affects the mind as such.[371]

I present then a perspective on the sweat of words that are working and encourage a sensory sympathy with them that does not need to be charitable but only "vibrant" and "behavioural" as that which essentially defines Kindness in poetry.

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[371] Zukofsky, *An "Objectivists" Anthology*, 204.

# <u>Conclusion: The Kindness in *Not* Knowing</u>

If one is reading in exile, Kindness is in the hands of the poem. It is a product of the function of poetics in the same way that Kindness is the product of the function of people. In order to discern what Kindness might look like and where it might come from, this project has presented, and continues to present, an argument that seeks to assimilate value to naïve readings through reparative methods that enjoy "vibrant singularity" and respond to vulnerability in poetics. Vulnerability plagues a reading of Kindness because as a "grammar of reading" the notion is like a turtle without a shell. But its determination is driven by this critical vulnerability. I have demonstrated reparative readings as a means to explore the possibilities that Kindness can deliver to both the neophyte and the text. Kindness should provide the shape and the nature with which one can approach a text from a fresh perspective, without the inscriptions that circumscribe modernist productions. In this sense, Kindness resonates with the Levinasian notion of *a priori* ethics and the notion of trace. However, Kindness always asks how do we experience this ethical position, the appearance of the "other", if we cannot experience the poem itself but must rather weave in and out of a "paranoid" position that assumes all naiveté is incorrect. Reading Kindness is not a science but rather an intuitive act of curiosity and the urge to reason out why some poems unpack so beautifully before the reader and others don't. In this sense the project is also vulnerable, it is necessarily suspicious, revelling in tangents and remaining on lines.

Reading Kindness and arguing for it as an intuitive procedure leads to an end result where one might read and re-imagine the machinations of the poem as both "vibrant", in Bennett's sense and "behavioural", in mine. Such anthropomorphism in reading the posture of a poem is meant to encourage intuitive reading, communication of understanding, and gestural knowing. As discussed in the introduction, the pursuit of Kindness started with an initial impression engendered by reading Reznikoff. The final chapter has drawn numerous conclusions about the nature of Kindness in poetry from studying his and Oppen's earlier work. Discussions around the difference between openness and exposedness, and form and "behaviour", as manners have led

to a more complete understanding of Kindness. It is, of course, bad practice to offer something new in a conclusion. However, since the very nature of this thesis abjures conclusion, I will offer something more like a resolution. A reparative method of reading after all, is not finite and despite the decisive nature of the notion of Kindness I have presented here, it, Kindness is at its best when it reads.

Much has been made throughout this thesis about vulnerability and doubt. The thesis has, as I have mentioned, been written in the spirit of exploration, with those two passengers in constant consideration. This discussion has been mediated by and been constantly contingent upon Sedgwick's notions of reparative reading. While anxiety about certainty has defined the latter part of the writing that I have covered, this uncertainty was never meant to reflect weakness but rather a patience of mind and a steadiness of gaze, as I have discussed in terms of the Objectivists. At this point of conclusion, it is useful to consider some of the later works of the Objectivists, generally written after their active participation in the group. What happens to the poetry of Reznikoff and Oppen is a fascinating development when we consider the attitude that the study of Kindness has identified. To this end, certain moments from Reznikoff's *Testimony* and *Holocaust* will be briefly looked, in addition to Oppen's *This in Which*, all of which evince a further reflection on the notions of exile and reading in exile that have been the primary, informing feature of Kindness itself. The term being used here as a means of resolution is *not knowing*, a term designed to resolve anxiety while also describing a platform of patience and equality in readerly experience that these texts demonstrate. *Not knowing*, in this context, provides a further epistemological layer to the idea of exile. As I will demonstrate in this conclusion, the not knowing-ness of exile can be valuable in poetics and, as a result, it can be argued that we can and must try to value it in reading.

Reznikoff and Oppen have been discussed not as tentative but instead as considered, carefully balanced and firm makers of poems. They offer new light on notions of Kindness in their later, less Imagist work where uncertainty, vulnerability and doubt shift and alter significantly. They take on a fuller sense of *not knowing* rather than, as previously discussed, a sense of uncertainty. Not knowing is a much more achievable poetic condition. Indeed it might be considered to reflect a sense of comfort in exile. The skepticism that fed Objectivist sincerity becomes acquiescence to *not knowing* and this condition makes for a new type of poetic sincerity. The condition of not knowing is more comfortable in the sense of its resolution and its

hope. Consequently, a poem's "behaviour" need not be so self-conscious because it does not need to *know*. The poems are not motivated by meaning and indeed the state of not-knowing they inhabit allows them to be undemanding and un-coercive, while also being Kind. They "behave" as though the poem has disavowed the reader and the environment and is finally in conversation with itself. The poem achieves Kindness with the "behavioural", "vibrant singularity" that intuitively makes the reader understand that the poem does not know to the same extent that does not know. It is important to note, however, that this proposal does not signify resignation. The poems remain tenacious and are sometimes even more so as they stand on the page. They appear with less scaffolding and accordingly seem less self-conscious.

The crucial thing about *not knowing* is that it presents a renegotiation of vulnerability. It questions and wonders but it is not vulnerable. Thus, in a self-conscious sense, the poems are calm with the gaps that they consider. In *Testimony*, Reznikoff writes a series of poems under the heading *"Gun Shot Wounds"*. The first poem in this series is as follows:

> In gunshot wounds the edges are sunken; in wounds made with a knife the edges are smooth and the lips of the wound stick out.[372]

The poem has a Kindness to it, despite, or perhaps because of, its concern with violence. It is comfortable with its condition of *not knowing* and seems to be a forensic note, even a medical point. However, the poem begins with "In" as though it were a story. This positions the reader as being outside the content, as the poem is informative to the same extent that it is an invitation to the imagination. It delivers an exiled moment of reading and is about wounds but not flesh, about bullets and blades but not blood. The poem enacts not a cauterization but rather, like the subject itself, a point of entry. It does not imagine pain but describes, almost learns alongside the reader, the actualities of pain, of death perhaps. There is a tenderness toward the detail that seems to imagine skin. It removes the violence of its subject and considers the wound as though it were a simple inevitability. The way this poem performs an act of *not knowing* is, therefore, a Kindness. It is comfortable without the drama of the infliction of the wound and it does not need to imagine the pain. It has no artifice, in the same way that a pathologist's table does not.

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[372] Reznikoff, *Testimony, with an Introduction by Kenneth Burke* (New York: The Objectivist Press, 1934), 59.

The reader has access to the poem without being persuaded of anything. Both poem and reader are in a state of *not knowing*. The wound is the object rather than the violence and there is an unfurling in the "lips of the wound" as the reader imagines the knife being pulled out. A series of gestures, incisions and punctures glide by in the poem and it remains about skin. The *not knowing* is perhaps vulnerability but Reznikoff's project here is specifically about *not knowing* itself. *Testimony* and *Holocaust* are volumes that deliberately engage with *not knowing* for various reasons. They impart vibrancy to the objects they encounter in a method similar to the profundity that struck Bennett before the vibrant materials in the storm drain in Baltimore. These poems attempt to know what has been missed as they engage vibrancy as alterity, yet they do so with a firm position of *not knowing*. This could be thought of as affective vulnerability but it is not. It is in fact an acknowledgement of a poetic function as the poem, as object, learns and speaks. It does not transform into the image but its "behaviour" is markedly in deference to its subject. This is not to say it is simply a poem *about something*. Rather, it is a poem about knowing something or indeed not knowing something. This engages the reader in a reflexive sense because the reparative reading can know the "behaviour" of the poem through a "grammar" for reading that is Kind.

The steadiness of enquiry and the inherent condition of something like acceptance is also present in Oppen's *This in Which* (1965). The first poem to be analyzed, "The Gesture", belongs to a section entitled "FIVE POEMS ABOUT POETRY":

> The question is: how does one hold an apple
> Who likes apples
>
> And how does one handle
> Filth? The question is
>
> How does one hold something
> In the mind which he intends
>
> To grasp and how does the salesman
> Hold a bauble he intends
>
> To sell? The question is
> When will there not be a hundred
>
> Poets who mistake that gesture

For a style.[373]

The gestural nature of Kindness discussed throughout this thesis has proven vitally important to the idea of "behaviour", whether it appears as residues, a smudging, self-consciousness or extreme confidence. The gesture here, however, is human and subjective. Oppen forces the tangible and the intangible together. The chain, a hand-to-hand structure that the enjambments create, is marked. Tangibility and grip are vital in this poem, as are the questions framing it. The first question "how does one hold an apple" is suffused with issues of the physical, indeed the manual. Apart from the last one, the questions the poem uses in order to drag itself along rhythmically are all concerned with hands. They seem to be at once concerned with the placement and the touch of fingers and palms, in addition to suggesting the impossibility of knowing. Context rolls out of the questions themselves, as in "Who likes apples", yet this does not bring resolution. The poem produces a residual gesture as the detail of context pales next to the improbability of holding. This also offers a notion of *not knowing*. Think here of Derrida's work on Heidegger's notion of hands, "to be at once to do with the placement and touch of fingers and palms and also to do with the impossibility of knowledge [*la pensée*]".[374] Perhaps this might be another way of considering the poem as an object of *not knowing*. The gestural rather than the premeditated presents the question "how can a poem lack premeditation?" I propose that in reading Kindness we can eschew the premeditated in favour of "behaviour".

The second stanza, as it falls into the third, is obscured by a lack of punctuation. The question marks in the preceding stanzas keep the form of the poem firm in a sense because the reader experiences questions. The second stanza drifts, almost blurs, in describing precisely the drift it traverses. The line is almost lost instead of being held on to or secured by the physical reality of a question mark. It not only falls into the next stanza but it does not end and continues toward another point to enact the act of losing, "something/In the mind which he intends/To grasp and […]" The hold in the mind is as fleeting as the grip on an apple that is not one's own. This is a percussive poem, it moves with various gestures and the reader understands its rather mercurial "behaviour". The final stanza proves puzzling. Are there a

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[373] Oppen, George, *This in Which* (New York: New Directions, New Directions, 1965), 22.

[374] Jacques Derrida, '*Geslecht II*: Heidegger's Hand.' in *Deconstruction and Philosophy: The Texts of Jacques Derrida,* trans. by John P. Leavey, ed. by John Sallis (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 171.

hundred poets who confuse the gesture of the salesman for style or are there one hundred poets who confuse the poetic gesture itself for style? The former echoes Pound's famous rallying-cry to "consider the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising agent for a new soap", but that is not a satisfactory conclusion because the gestures the poem reflects are multiple, since intention, memory and the feel of an apple are present.[375] As a result, gestures are various, which explains why the gesture gets mistaken for style or why it is better understood as style that replaces gesture. The poem knows and needs to know multiplicity because it baulks at the finality of "style" as it conceives it. "Style", therefore, suggests a finality, it suggests an artifice, finesse and a falseness that cannot be reconciled with the gesture. The gesture, therefore, is more fundamental, more human and perhaps more *not knowing*. This is not meant in the sense that questions need be asked, the question itself provides the gesture, but rather in the sense that the momentum of the poem stops with style, it is limiting and deceptively final.

The Kindness we can read in this poem lies in its inquiry and synchronicity. It seems to behave in a way that is *about* its subject and, more specifically, it produces questions that it not only does not need to know the answers to but also seems to provide the answer, which is, rather paradoxically, that neither the poem nor the reader need know. That is, it *cannot* know. As the trajectory of the poem extends from fingers around an apple to salesmen and finally to the hands-off aestheticism of "style", it offers a release in some sense. Its movement is similar to a hand moving through the air, it is a gesture in itself. As vulnerability is absent, the poem's questioning of the verbal act of *not knowing* is most important. The apple taken by the hand from the tree could be read as having Biblical connotations too. Eve's hand grips the apple from the tree of knowledge and thus ensues the Fall. One might argue that here is a narrative of origin for *not knowing*. However, the poetic condition of *not knowing* being discussed here is not a punishment or exclusion, it has the conditions of comfort in exile, for the reader and in turn the poem. Instead, the exclusion inherent in *not knowing* provides a moment of conclusion, which allows the reader to not know as well and the questions become reparative themselves. The question "how does one hold an apple" is the object of the poem, the holding not the apple, and is Kind because it considers and invites, the reader, poet, and poem in from exile.

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[375] Pound, *Literary Essays*, 6.

This is not to propose that certainty prohibits Kindness. Another poem from *This in Which* presents an explicit Biblical reference and foregrounds certainty within the poetic object. It negotiates agency beautifully and is both subtly "behavioural" and simultaneously loud about "behaviour". "Psalm" presents a patience of mind and a steadiness of gaze that renders the poem "vibrantly singular":

> *Veritas sequitur ...*
>
> In the small beauty of the forest
> The wild deer bedding down—
> That they are there!
>
>            Their eyes
> Effortless, the soft lips
> Nuzzle and the alien small teeth
> Tear at the grass
>
>            The roots of it
> Dangle from their mouths
> Scattering earth in the strange woods.
> They who are there.
>
>            Their paths
> Nibbled thru the fields, the leaves that shade them
> Hang on the distances
> Of sun
>
>            The small nouns
> Crying faith
> In this in which the wild deer
> Startle, and stare out.[376]

The first line is evidently "behavioural": "In the small beauty of the forest" plays with scale. Such smallness must be in contrast to the forest, it even suggests a sense of quiet. Blades of grass, leaves, dapples of light, insects and animals all participate in the "small beauty of the forest". It seems as if scale is inverted in a gestural sense, since the "small beauty" does something to the reader and his/her perception. That is, the small beauty could make up the limits of the human experience of the forest. The line magnifies its subject so that it becomes greatly intensified because of the tension it induces. The beauty of the forest is not small because the forest is huge and looms large. But the gorgeous impossibility of the beauty of the forest being small, of it

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[376] Oppen, *Collected Poems*, 78.

being somehow containable, works to pull the reader's desire into the forest, or rather into the poem itself. The line is tense because it, the line itself, the object that is the crucial determinant of the poem, articulates awe in a way that is directly knowable to the reader. The communicative line that runs back and forth between poem and reader is not a metaphor but a wish that is at once fulfilled. It engenders understanding and makes the reader share. Therefore, it is Kind.

The poem seems to be watching. Deixis is enacted and the poem animates joy on the page through its sensing of an unutterable quality that must have voice, "That they are there!" The line is almost nonsensical, it presents a departure in a moment that simultaneously fully inhabits the moment. The syntactical operation seems to accelerate reading itself as the repetition of "th" and the down beat "are" make the line rhythmic rather than musical, expletive rather than lyrical. It seems so sparse yet in its disavowal of the artifice of meaning it allows the reader to know it. The later "They who are there" follows by punctuating the vista with the internal dialogue of the poem, a dialogue that seems to resolutely not owe anything to the reader. It does not need to be known and does not care to explain. It brims with the presence of "they". The final stanza returns to the powerfully small, "The small nouns/Crying faith/ In this in which […]". After the alien nuzzling of the forest, this last stanza feels disorienting. The small nouns throw the reader, as "small teeth" present an early instance of the small noun in the poem, yet "small beauty" is confusing, the moment perhaps of recognition and of distillation. The poem at this point remembers it is a poem, it enacts its self-awareness by inhabiting the forest that its phrase "small beauty" might have contained. The huge multiplicity of locating "this in which" is so startling that it startles the deer. The poem fully inhabits its own construction. "In this in which" slides by, seeming to mean that "this" was what "the small nouns" were "crying faith" in. However, "this in which" appears to be the scene or the experience, the forest of the poem. As the reader reads, "the wild deer" that indicate this slip, the deer "Startle and stare out." The deer listen to hear the reader, they have noticed the poem itself. This poetic procedure can be read as a process of reading that lays itself bare before the reader and then finally leaves him/her back outside the poem; its last word is "out". This can be read as an acknowledgement and accommodation of exile. The animation it enacts is startling, it seems to so thoroughly engage the reader in looking at it itself and it finishes by looking back, highlighting the reparative relationship that Kindness engenders with exile. There is a sense not of satisfaction in

the text but perhaps a sense of rested comfort, rather than Zukofsky's "rested totality". The willfulness of pronouns and exclamation marks suggest a lack of self-consciousness as the poem engages profoundly with what it, itself, is. 'Psalm' is an open object, it is tangible and yet intangible, concrete and yet hard to retain. In this sense, it engages with exile, making it a poem that behaves and in which we can read Kindness.

Not looking but witnessing is at stake in Reznikoff's truly harrowing text *Holocaust*. Witnessing itself is troubled over in this traumatized text. Following on from his project in *Testimony*, Reznikoff studied the *Trials of the Criminals before Nuremberg Military Tribunal* and the records of the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem to produce a text that attempts neither to know nor to understand the foul horrors of the Holocaust. It attempts, instead, to *not know* and to reconcile that not knowing. There is a huge amount to be said about Reznikoff's response to the Nazi Holocaust in this book. It rings with guilt, collective consciousness, sorrow, regret and incomprehension. Its steadfast gaze at the texts from which it feeds is unflinching and silent. This book, however, unlike *Testimony* does not have Ephesians 3:41 on its title page, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and railing, be put away from you, with all malice".[377] The text is solemn, unforgiving and unrelenting. It is in reading what it can only be, that is, heartbreaking, painful and demanding, that it seems to inherently know that the vast majority of its readers cannot know what it is about. In the same sense that "*Gun Shot Wounds*" renders the hurt or pain it contains as a vital, almost vitalizing, sense of the difference between awareness and knowing, this is *not knowing*. *Holocaust* renders the not knowing of its subject acute and painful, and yet it is there to be read or to be written. It presents the curious agony of safety and comfort:

> A woman came with her little daughter
> and S.S. men were there one morning
> and took the child away:
> a mother was forbidden to keep her child with her.
> Later, the woman found out that her child had been thrown into the fire
> in which the dead were being burnt,
> and that night threw herself against the electrified barbed wire fence around
> the camp.[378]

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[377] Reznikoff, *Testimony*, Title page.
[378] Charles Reznikoff, *Holocaust* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 59.

This thesis is essentially a process of recognition. Looking at these poems by Reznikoff written about one of the major traumas of the twentieth century, we might remember the analysis of Pound's negotiation of World War 1 in comparison to Owen's in Chapter 2. There was a notion, provided by Siegfried Sassoon's observation, that Owen's poetic was "written about one of the major traumas of the infantry soldier".[379] Pound's poem, as discussed the poetic imperative that a poem had to be about poetry itself. That is, a lack of first-hand knowledge informs Pound's poetry and the action of the text itself. In *Testimony* and *Holocaust*, Reznikoff presents this condition of *not knowing* with a sense that the object, the poem itself, does not know. All the while, the substance the texts are made from precisely presents witnessing. In this sense, the poems are objects that do *not know*, encounters in exile. A poem's sincerity and, indeed, its behaviour are not acts of acquiescence to this not knowing, they do not subordinate to ignorance, but rather engage in exile and become an object/event accepts—in order to achieve comfort in and crucially from—its condition of *not knowing*.

I will conclude, or better resolve, this thesis with a very short poem from *Testimony*:

> As the case was turned over upon the wharf, a rattling was heard inside. The looking-glass was broken. The pieces were wedge-shaped; the cracks radiated from a center, as if the glass had been struck by a pointed instrument.[380]

The rattling of the glass that had been struck is poetic *not knowing*, it demonstrates exile, in that it is unobtainable, curious, present as (aural) trace. Much has been made of "meaning" throughout this thesis as the term has been wrestled with frequently. The development of the notion of "behaviour" has been an attempt not to disavow meaning but rather to renegotiate the matter of reading a poem in order to extract meaning. Kindness has been offered as an alternative "grammar of reading" that engages negotiations of accepted codes of meaning and "behaviour" has consequently been constructed to provide an alternative to form. The resolution is that after this study, we as readers might find not exactly "meaning" in the poem but Kindness. In

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[379] Sassoon, "Introduction", in Owen, *Poems*, v.
[380] Reznikoff, *Testimony*, 71.

the same way that the Reznikoff poem above listens to and peers into a box, containing an object of reflection that has been fractured and perhaps even broken, we might as readers not need to consider the object of reflection itself but its fracture. As we peer in we do not know the object but we can glimpse the fractures as they radiate. *Not knowing* can provide something like comfort because we can examine and imagine the consciousness, the pointed instrument that fractures the object, the mirror. We can read Kindness when we notice the fractures, wedge-shaped and "behavioural", yet we remain on the wharf examining a rattling box. Kindness comes when we invite an understanding that we remain outside the poem and the poem remains inside itself, the encounter is object and event, yet both parties want to explain, to *know*. The meaning of Kindness is that we the reader do *not know* but the poem gives us glimpses not just at the object in the box but at its various fractures, its wedge-shaped cracks, so that we might feel the pointed instrument that has caused or created them. The reader knows that they do not know and in this sense neither does the poem, an encounter in exile. The reader, in this "grammar of reading" can discern the quality of Kindness as s/he reads the comfort of understanding in exile by considering the "behaviour" of the poem and this means, makes, or allows for Kindness.

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