

Poetry Explained - How Personal Experience and Background Knowledge Help us Make Sense of Poetry – Ezra Pound

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Abstract

When reading literary texts, we have to be aware of the fact that each reader of a certain text will get a different meaning out of it. It is a nonsense to ask of readers to get the exact same meaning because we cannot possibly know what the author had in mind when he wrote the text and we make sense of everything, especially poetry, through our own personal life experience. Meaning "occurs within and by means of complex systems of codes derived from and determined by human culture". In order to understand a text, which is open, incomplete, insufficient, we have to make use of our imagination and background knowledge to decipher the codes. The reader's task is "to draw out of the work the full complexity of meanings pre-packaged within it". Thus the emphasis of poetics shifts from the "work of art" to the "work of interpretation" which creates the poem from the poem's primary material. The reader's imagination has to fill in the gaps in the text the author left for us, gaps which wait to be filled with meaning and which make us, the readers, become active and creative agents of deciphering codes. Once put on paper, "the work of art never comes to rest". With every reading, a new meaning will be found. With every reader, a range of new meanings will be found. But even more so, with every new reading by the same reader, especially over years, new meanings will be found. How does this happen? you might ask. Through life experience and background knowledge.

Keywords: *Ezra Pound, Modernist movement, Imagism, metro, days, violets*

1. Introduction

I know, it sounds sterile and too academic, but join me in this easy explanatory process and you might never again discard a poem without first trying to get one single meaning out of it.

When we look at the same picture, landscape, piece of poetry, we see very different things depending on the age of the beholder, life experience and background knowledge, including academic education. We are a sum of our life experiences. Lets' say we all look at an urban landscape, some children are playing on a playground, a few parents are watching them, sitting on benches, there are some trees around the playground, some block of flats, an old run down factory behind it all, the sun is shining, but you can also see some clouds gathering up in the far background. What do you actually see?

My almost two year-old daughter will see children ready to play with her, older children she can imitate, younger children she can push around should she feel like it, she is a food-radar and will spot in an instance any food scattered around the playground or in little hands, she will see fluffy stuffed toys to pluck from children's arms, swings, slides and seesaws and any living creature hidden in the darkest corner or high above any branch. If there is an insect, a cat or a dog in the playground, she will see it and take action.

What does the mother in me see? Children playing to keep her company, a sick child who coughs, so he must be avoided in order not to get whatever he is having, rusted nails on the ground under the swings and broken glass scattered all over, mental note to myself – avoid that area as long as possible; a parent is smoking right next to the children – avoid that, too; a child is eating chips – avoid him, too; the clouds on the sky may announce a chillier temperature for the afternoon stroll, take a warmer piece of clothing. What did I see before having a child? A noise source I needed to avoid if children were playing. What does the teacher in me see? Those four-five teenagers smoking and sitting on swings instead of being at school, learning something. What does the geographer in me see? It is an urban landscape, it's autumn because the leaves of the trees are yellow, the industry was leveled out because the factory seems closed for years, the clothing and shoes of children and parents are cheap, their financial power is limited, the sun is shining and the sky is clouding up, it is one of those perfect beautiful autumn days, an average of ten – twelve in the month of October.

The weather is about to change. What does a foreign investor see? An ex-communist country with lots of cheap labour force, now unemployed because the factory is closed, a paradise for a new business or a blackhole for his money due to bureaucracy. What does a weather man see? The temperatures are high, about twenty degrees Celsius, the weather is about to change, a cold air mass is approaching. What does a low class uneducated person who is in a hurry see? Three more bus stops to go to get to work. What does a drunkard who just got up on a bus see? He missed his bus stop by a kilometer. Again! What does an artist see? A perfect autumn day, autumn went nuts and painted the trees yellow, orange, red, brown, green, he or she should paint it or take a picture of it! What does a blind person see? He or she hears the traffic sounds, the shouts and giggles of children, the birds singing, he can smell the leaves fallen on the ground, he is feeling the sidewalk with his cane.

As you can see, we see different things looking at the same picture depending on what we have previously lived and who we are. But a picture can say a thousand words.

2. Ezra Pound's poetry and how to make sense of it

A poem can be a picture, a picture of an emotion, the less words and lines, the more it manages to convey, the more compact, the more the meanings embedded. **Ezra Pound**, the American Modern poet and critic who was a major figure of the early **modernist movement** due to **Imagism**, also thought so back in 1912. Imagism is a movement he developed, derived from classical Chinese and Japanese poetry, stressing clarity, precision of imagery and economy of language. Pound's aim was clarity: a fight against abstraction, romanticism, rhetoric, inversion of word order, and over-use of adjectives. Imagism was based on three principles:

1. Direct treatment of the "thing" whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.

3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

Superfluous words, particularly adjectives, should be avoided. He advocated for naming the actual thing, emotion, describing it, not aim, not suggest, but grasp it, using little words, condense it to its essence.

I chose Ezra Pound especially because some cannot make any sense of his art and judge him and his work only through his twelve-year long stay in a psychiatric hospital, where he got after months in detention in a military camp during World War II.

2.1. First poem - "In a station of the metro"

The poem "In a station of the metro" managed to catch my eye a few years back, during my Master studies. Now, that I am revisiting it, I am finding new meanings hidden in the fourteen words. I was inspired enough not to read any critic before the actual poem.

I was looking for a poem for an essay and none caught my eye.

Two simple short lines, the first announcing nothing special:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Nothing. I closed my eyes.

Nothing. Deep breath.

Wait.

All of a sudden, in front of my eyes I could see a station of a subway (or underground) with people passing by me in a hurry, all kinds of people: Afro – Americans, Native Americans, Europeans, Spanish and Asian people. They were all going somewhere and their faces told stories. As I was looking at them, I could see with the eyes of my mind images of their family, their work place, their concerns rising above their heads and floating, following them along their rushed walk. And so I have decided to stop upon this poem.

A few years ago, in New York, I got on a subway train from Pennsylvania Station. I was alone, for the first time in my life there, a little scared and anxious in the huge river like flowing mass of strangers. I did not know what to do, cry, run, scream, crumble to the ground, move forward. Suddenly, in the river of faces which cascaded by me, I saw a beautiful friendly face, and then another and another, and then a cute child's face, and then another handsome old man, and I tried all that day to find words for what this had meant to me, and I could not find any words that seemed to me worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion. That day a child's smile made my day and the deep, serene light blue eyes of an old man made me think about aging and made me fear death less because I thought that no man who is so close to death would be so serene and happy if something awfull was about to happen.

To me, it happened exactly like in the poem, from the river of indifferent rushing people who formed a compact waterfall beside me, some faces appeared, detached themselves and draw my attention.

I read the second line of the poem:

Petals on a wet, black bough.

And my mind went back a few years ago on the subway. The word "black" made me look at the Afro – Americans' faces. Some of them were young and happy, some of them were old and serene, some of them were adults and looked down on others. But all their faces told stories. I could decipher that the youngsters were going home from school and they were happy about it, I could tell that the old people made peace with this world and now entered the line for a next and better one, I could tell that the adults were unsatisfied by their jobs and their social condition or had their cars in the service and were forced to go on a subway with the low-class people, I could tell a bit of their lives "reading" their faces.

At the same time, I wondered what the young Asian girl seating a few seats in front of me could tell about the people around her. She looked only briefly around, never stopping on anybody's face. She seemed to look through people. And that moment I was sure she saw nothing of the great show which unfolded on the subway in front of her eyes. A racist man or woman saw stupid, tired, dirty people with no skills or rights riding on a train, a superficial observer saw people of all races riding the same train, but I saw lives and stories. I saw wet, shiny petals on a bough. I think that, by using the word "petals", Ezra Pound wanted to refer to their softness and kindness gained during the hundreds of years of slavery by mothers who caressed their children one night, not knowing if the next morning they will still be with them. "Wet" might refer to their freshness, spiritual qualities and abilities, like petals in the morning dew, which waited to be discovered by white people; it may also hint to the hard work most of them were put to. "Bough" to me has just one meaning: a branch of the big tree of mankind. The author may say that they have the exact same rights as whites have, because they are part of the same big family. And it is time to let all our prejudices about them die. But who can really tell what Pound had in mind? Maybe the word "black" refers to all human beings who are consumed by their petty lives, who live without really living and are bound to die anyway.

Now, a few years later, I get a totally new meaning. Pounds says "petals", not "flowers". Could it be because he hints at our mortality or that we do not feel complete on our own and we seek something or someone to make us feel whole? Or could he hint at our instability and capacity to adapt, willingness to move, as petals in the wind?

The adjective "black" no longer makes me think of African – Americans, the bough, the branch all the petals sit on is black, he may suggest the fact that recent scientific discoveries have proved that the biblical Adam was black, all humankind has the same black root. Why is the bough wet? Wet, water, tears of joy and sadness, sweat, rain, morning dew, biblical flood, which one is it? I guess all and none. To me "wet" signifies the life giving water which is all around us and in us (we are 80% water). If I read the poem in a very pessimistic day, I would have thought about suffering, torment,

pain and crying. My Christian upbringing also planted in my mind the idea that life is a long row of sufferings, with short moments of undeserved happiness. Other religions do not believe that, they consider Heaven is a place on Earth, life is beautiful and is worth living, but rarely there will be some short moments of sorrow, which are just little obstacles to overcome.

And then I read the critics. Ezra Pound wrote this poem after his experience on the Paris underground - "metro" from the title means underground or subway. He wrote *"I got out of a train at, I think, La Concorde, and in the jostle I saw a beautiful face, and then, turning suddenly, another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful face. All that day I tried to find words for what this made me feel."* To my surprise, his thoughts and experience in 1913 was very similar to the one I had and felt in 2003, exactly ninety year later! Or did he manage to convey the exact revelation and intense emotion in only fourteen words over a ninety years gap? Whatever the explanation, it was amazing for me! Either way, both we had to cross the Atlantic Ocean to get this experience – I, an European, crossed it to have the experience in New York, he, an American, crossed it to live it in Paris.

He worked on the poem for a year, reducing it to its essence in the style of a Japanese haiku, deleting from thirty lines to only fourteen words. The poem is essentially a set of images that have unexpected likeness and convey the rare emotion that Pound was experiencing at that time. Arguably the heart of the poem is not the first line, nor the second, but the mental process that links the two together. "In a poem of this sort," as Pound explained, "one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective."

He may have been inspired by a Suzuki Harunobu print he almost certainly saw in the British Library (Richard Aldington mentions the specific prints he matched to verse).



Pound may have been inspired by this ukiyo-e print he saw in the British Library.
Woman Admiring Plum Blossoms at Night, Suzuki Harunobu, 18th century

In this quick poem, Pound compares these faces to "*petals on a wet, black bough,*" suggesting that on the dark subway platform, the people look like flower petals stuck on a tree branch after a rainy night. The shortness of this poem fits with its topic; when reading, the words flash by quickly, just as a subway speeds away from the platform in an instant. The doors open quickly, revealing a sea of faces, and then close again - the faces are gone after a fleeting glance. This poem's length and quick pace matches the constant motion of a train as it speeds by. Though short, this poem is very sensory in nature; it allows the reader to imagine a scene while reading the lines.

Pound connects images of petals and boughs to a mass of humanity - linking a man-made metropolitan scene with the cycles of nature. Pound's use of living metaphors adds to the fleeting tone of this poem. Flowers and trees, like human beings on a metro, are constantly moving, growing, and changing. This short glimpse through the metro doors is the only time that group of people will be as they are in that instant. Similarly, no two petals will ever look exactly the same, as rains come and go, winters freeze, and new buds bloom.

By linking human faces, a synecdoche for people themselves, with petals on a damp bough, the poet calls attention to both the elegance and beauty of human life, as well as its transience. A dark, wet bough implies that it has just rained, and the petals stuck to the bough were shortly before attached to flowers from the tree. They may still be living, but they will not be for long. In this way, Pound calls attention to human mortality as a whole - we are all dying. The word "apparition" is considered crucial as it implies both presence and absence - and thus transience as mentioned previously, it gives human life a spiritual, mystical significance. The plosive word "petals" implies ideas of delicate, feminine beauty which contrasts with the bleakness of the "wet, black bough". What the poem signifies is questionable; many critics argue that it deliberately transcends traditional form and therefore its meaning is solely found in its technique as opposed to in its content. Additionally, some have interpreted the poem to be a Memento Mori. However, when Pound had the inspiration to write this poem few of these considerations came into view. He simply wished to translate his perception of beauty in the midst of ugliness into a single, perfect image in written form.

How much one can say and write about a two-lines poem!

2.2. Second poem - "And the days are not full enough"

Another very short poem which caught my eye is "**And the days are not full enough**", in only four lines Pound condensed the essence of life and human thought. I do not think there is one man out there who does not relate to it. The first two lines "*And the days are not full enough/ And the nights are not full enough*" states the obvious universal truth, people have always tried to achieve earthly possessions, become famous, be successful, get in important decision making positions, get rich beyond imagination, be world leaders since the beginning of time. For these, they have worked hard, struggled, shed sweat and blood, and in the process they must have felt at one point it was not enough. The days seemed not to be full enough of work, of moments spent with the family, of things checked from the to-do lists; you try, struggle, hurry, run, work, try again, but there seems not to be enough time to do it all during the day. At night, instead of sleeping, recharging your batteries and letting your mind rest, you try to catch up with the workload and continue working, thus throwing yourself in a vicious circle of work - sleeplessness - tiredness - dissatisfaction - poor

night sleep – work. The nights become not full enough, too. Not full enough of tasks being done, not full enough of love and passion, which you have sacrificed in order to work. Ezra Pound uses the expression "not full" about days and nights, not "not long", thus emphasizing the idea of emptiness, the stress shifts to feelings of bareness, emptiness and superfluousness of efforts.

Everyone must have felt this way at one point or another in his/ her life! After meeting the basic needs for survival, air, water, food, clothes, a house, safety, family, friendship, sex, we all need self – esteem, confidence, respect by others and professional achievement, according to Abraham Maslow's pyramid of needs. To meet the need on top of the pyramid, we are unwittingly and unconsciously let all the other needs unmet. We all have done it, I am doing it right now, in order to finish this article I am spending less time with my family, I am sleeping less and eating whatever it is ready in five minutes. As all these lacks accumulate, the pyramid starts to tilt and that is the moment we feel our days and nights are not full enough.

Why are we consciously depriving ourselves of basic needs such as food and sleep? To make our mark in the world. Every single human being since the beginning of times and mankind has tried to make his/ her mark. Some 40,000 years ago B.C., the prehistoric man marked his passage on earth through cave paintings in Cantabria, Spain and on the island of Sulawesi. Throughout centuries, man has discovered new continents, medicine, vaccines, surgery, the atom, split the atom, electricity, flight, built empires, started bloody crusades in the name of God, killed forty-five million people or eleven million trying to erase an entire race from the face of the earth, tried to create a superior race, played God, cloned animals, flew into space, climbed the highest mountain, presumably stepped on the Moon, discovered the nuclear power bomb, developed automobiles and mobile phones, built robots, developed the internet, all in order to leave a mark behind. We do get remunerated for our work and make a living, but the ultimate goal is to make the mark. The human mind is inquisitive and needs to discover, it cannot stay restless, the promise of new, of fame, of money, of power makes it work.

We are all very different individuals, there are not two identical people in this ocean of seven billion, so are our marks. One may want to be the President of the United States of America, another one would settle for being the most important leader in the European Union, other may want to rebuild a former empire, while some want smaller things, which are though crucial for them, such as having his/ her own house, being financially independent, getting a car, travelling the world or having a baby. At this moment in my life, my mark is surely my daughter, I no longer feel the urge to do anything humanly possible in order to get a leading position in a school or a firm, I can let it go. The urge is gone, I found my peace and I can now concentrate on turning the child into a valuable person. I do not want to be at my best for strangers at work, I have decided to be the best person possible for my close family. Who knows, maybe in twenty years I will change my mind.

Especially when we are young we feel the need to go out there, in the wide world, and discover, conquer, make friends, try new things, fall in love, experience dangerous situations, be restless. One may say this is the essence of young spirit. In fact, it is basic biology. The drop of dopamine is so low, the youngster feels so depressed, that he/ she is willing to do anything to get a thrill, a kick out of something, to get the dopamine level up again and so feel happy again. Novelty releases

dopamine. Young people feel they can conquer the world, become whatever they want, fly to the Moon. We all make a list of things to do in life. As life passes by and we see that it turned out differently from what we have planned, that we had an ordinary life so far and prospects are it will not get a lot better soon, we might feel the fear of only scratching the surface of the things on our list. This thought will wake us up in the night and we will feel that *"life slips by like a field mouse"*. The verb "slip" means that we almost caught it in our hands, almost grasped it, and then it got away from us, hinting on missed opportunities that could have turned our life around. We almost got it right, we almost made a difference, we almost succeeded, but did not in the end. We get so tangled in our struggles, we waste so much time on insignificant things that we do not realize how quickly life passes by and how short it is. Man is transient on earth like the quick run of a mouse. Pound chose to compare man's life to a mouse because it is one of the lowest animals in the food chain, almost all other animals can transform it into a meal, it is tiny and quiet. So it is a man's life to Mother Nature and its greatness, tiny, quiet and insignificant.

The most interesting choice of words is most definitely in the last line *"Not shaking the grass"*, why *"grass"*? Why not a tiny fish in a blue ocean, an insect in a field of lavender, a fruit fly who lives only for a day in a field of red roses, why a mouse in a sea of green? In his life-long struggles, man manages not even to shake his environment. The grass, a synecdoche for Mother Nature, if shaken, it comes back into position immediately, as if we were not even there. In a life time, we do not even stir the grass, this is how little Pound feels we matter in our journey on earth.

Grass – green – Mother Nature, this is my thought sequence. Lets' take a look at the possible meanings of this color. Green is the color most commonly associated with springtime, life returning to earth, growth, nature, youth, hope and envy. Green is often used to describe anyone young, inexperienced, probably by the analogy to immature and unripe fruit. Examples include *"green cheese"*, a term for a fresh, unaged cheese, and *"greenhorn"*, an inexperienced person. The most famous woman ever painted, Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa wears green, to express her youth, her inexperience, promise of a beautiful life at its beginning, and also to say she is not from a noble family.

The color of clothing also showed the owner's social status in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, green was the color of merchants and gentry, red of nobility. It is the most important color in Islam, representing the lush vegetation of the promised Paradise, rebirth, renewal and immortality. Green as the color of hope is connected with the color of springtime; hope represents the faith that things will improve after a period of difficulty, like the renewal of flowers and plants after the winter season. Pound highlights the sad side of things, life does return to earth every spring, life does go on, even if we no longer are here.

Surveys also show that green is the color most associated with the calm, the agreeable, and tolerance. Red is associated with heat, blue with cold, and green with an agreeable temperature. Red is associated with dry, blue with wet, and green, in the middle, with dampness. Red is the most active color, blue the most passive; green, in the middle, is the color of neutrality and calm. Green is the color of balance in the world and we do not count, we are too tiny for the great show of life, nothing is lost when we disappear.

The word "and" at the very beginning of the title and of the poem makes us feel that the author has already told us about his concern and this is just a natural continuation. He did, he tackled his fear of leaving no mark in his poem "**Middle Aged**" in 1912, saying "*So I, the fires that lit once dreams/ Now over and spent*". A middle aged man, he too, like the rest of us, feels already dead because his youth dreams and energy fires are gone, from now on it is all in vain.

I think the tone of the poem is actually optimistic, in my opinion Ezra Pound sends us the message that we are all the same, we have the same fears, hopes and dreams, there is nothing wrong with us for feeling this way, no matter what we do, we will all get in the same place, it is not a competition towards the end of life, so get out there and do things!

2.3. The third poem - "A Girl"

The third and the last poem that reached my heart due to similar personal experiences, and I want to explain to you how it unfolded its meanings to me, is "**A Girl**". The longest poem so far, with ten lines, describes the moment a girl pictures herself a tree and gives accurate information about her new state of being. It seems to be the play of a little girl. "*The sap has ascended my arms,/ The tree has grown in my breast-/... The branches grow out of me, like arms.*" The little girl seems to be talking to an adult, who indulges her in the play of imagination. The adult tells her she can be whatever she wants, a tree, moss, violets, anything at all. The first word which foretells a change in the mood of the poem and the tone of the grown up is "*wind*". There is wind above the violets, there is a change of weather in the perfect landscape the child pictures, the wind predicts a storm. And a storm indeed comes in the childish play when the adult says "*And all this is folly to the world.*" The adult could not keep silent and not spoil the girl's play, he or she told her this exercise of imagination looks foolish to grown ups, who are so sucked into their harsh reality centered on money, that they can no longer enjoy a pure innocent play of imagination. As many children have noticed, adults are sad. Sad because they work so hard for a living, let work drain them all of all energy, that the moment they get together with their children, children who are ready to play, learn and discover, adults are sad, tired and still.

Adults also feel the need to follow rules, to conform, to blend in, not to be different, anything that is different and draws attention is considered foolish. This may be due to so many years of mass education which leveled personalities and forced children and teenagers into conforming and following rules. Young children do not have this, they do not have rules in their discovery process, and they do not grasp the idea of what a rule is, they do not conform to society's set of rules. They are balls of pure energy, imagination and creativity.

I would not have known this if I did not have a small child of my own who behaves naturally and freely, if I did not teach students who forgot how to play at the beginning of an English lesson and need to follow rules in their play and if I did not have friends who work in educational institutions and completely lost their innate ability to do something spontaneous and out of the ordinary, there are the "mighty" rules to follow!

Pound also tackled beautifully society's set of rules which forces you to conform in the poem **"Black Slippers: Bellotti"** in which he portrays a young girl, Celestine, traveling and conversing at the table, keeping her feet out of her slippers under the table. This gesture of taking one's shoes off means one feels free, free of any timetable to follow, free of society's rule to wear shoes at the table, relaxed and comfortable. It is similar to letting your hair fall down your shoulders, waving it like a lioness and feeling the whole world is yours and you can do anything you put your mind to. You are there, ready to overcome anything life throws at you, standing tall and with your chin up. Pound masterfully describes the moment Celestine gives in and conforms, in a gesture many must have missed *"But I await with patience,/ To see how Celestine will re-enter her slippers./ She re-enters them with a groan."* The groan is the sign she still disapproves.

Coming back to our tree girl, another interpretation I thought of due to my personal experience - a written text truly never comes to rest once on paper - is that the story is about a young adult woman who finally found her place in this world, peace of mind and a meaning to life. She sought it all her life so far and now she feels good about herself, about the world, she feels deeply connected with Mother Nature, she feels part of this world, she feels all that is natural, good, pure concentrated in herself, so connected to Earth that she envisions a tree going through her veins, growing out of her from hands and feet *"Downward,/ The branches grow out of me, like arms."* and clutching the ground with fingers, making the connection complete umbilical cord – like. Now the nourishing sap goes up her veins from Mother Nature.

Many women feel goddesses at one point in their lives and love to walk barefooted to feel the energy of Mother Earth flowing upwards, as maybe Celestine from the poem does.

I had a similar experience as a young adult when our brain has mysterious ways of getting its needed level of dopamine. When I finally understood my place in this world and assumed it, I no longer craved for the lack of responsibility of men and their freedom, I gave up wearing my jeans and T-shirts, gave up my boyish look, I felt a goddess who has the capacity of having children – making people, I felt so beautiful, confident, powerful, able to fly, so feminine and so proud of being a woman! I felt that all women from the beginning of time concentrated in me, I was a representative of all women around the world, an ambassador of womankind. It was my duty as a young woman to continue my education, to be independent and free, be kind to myself, to dress in fashionable clothes, mainly dresses and skirts, to be feminine, to wear makeup if needed, to be beautiful. All that was feminine was concentrated in me, it was my duty to be a role model to all women out there. My legacy was to pass on these thoughts to my daughter, if I ever had one.

I did have a daughter, now I do not feel as free, as able to fly nor as beautiful as before. Two years after I gave birth to her, I discovered with great surprise the woman in me, my femininity, who I was before, the fact that I am not only a mother. Every day I deconstruct myself, the pieces fly apart and come back together and each time I find a new me.

Then I turned to critics and found out that Ezra Pound based this poem on the myth of Apollo, the Sun God, and Daphne, a nymph. The traditional myth is that Apollo insulted Eros saying he was not worthy of his bow and arrow. In response, Eros angrily shot Apollo with an arrow to induce his love, and then shot the nymph Daphne with an arrow to make her feel hatred. Apollo fell head over heels for Daphne and continuously followed her, while she loathed him (and all men), desperate to

escape his pursuit. Finally, Eros intervened to help Apollo catch Daphne, but she begged her father, Peneus, to change her form. He agreed, and thus Daphne transformed into a tree. "A Girl" details her transformation. In the poem, Apollo accepts Daphne as she is, but laments her foolish choice to transform into a tree in the last two lines: "*A child—so high—you are/ And this is folly to the world.*"

Ezra Pound chose to employ split narration in this poem. The first five-line stanza reads as if Daphne is narrating. She closely details her transformation, describing the feeling of the tree entering her hands and growing in her breast. However, Pound wrote the second half of the poem from the perspective of a third-person onlooker, likely Apollo.

There is a very interesting choice of flowers in the poem – why violets, the little fragile wild flowers which appear by themselves in the woods and not roses, daffodils, peonies, chrysanthemums, freesias, lilies, hyacinths, tulips or anything else? I realized that violets have a special meaning in this poem. Their significance varies, but usually they have been associated with the resurrection of the seasonally dying Earth god, Attis, who, according to one legend, mutilated himself under a pine tree and died from the flow of blood from his open wounds. Violets appeared where his blood shed.

In the language of flowers, it has had various symbolic meanings. Its color may indicate the love of truth or, conversely, the truth of love.

Violets were often used as symbols of fasting or mourning. The poet Shelly uses the flower to commemorate the grief of a lost love in the poem "**On a Faded Violet.**" Violets have made their appearance in literature and painting as symbolic of human emotions. In Shakespeare's "**Hamlet**", Ophelia, upon learning of the death of her father, Polonius, speaks to the queen in the language of the flowers, a convention much observed in the 16th century. Her allusions are to the tragic event which has taken place and the emotions and attributes which are symbolized by certain flowers: rosemary for remembrance; pansies (of the violet family) for love; fennel for flattery; columbine for ingratitude; rue for repentance; daisies for faithlessness; and violets for constancy or devotion.

According to Bullfinch's Mythology, the daughter of Demeter, the Earth Mother, was playing with her companions, gathering lilies and violets, and filling her basket and her apron with them, when Pluto saw her, loved her, and carried her off to live with him in the underworld. A similar English myth about the change of seasons had the violet playing the central role in the return of the captive bride to the earth again in the spring: "But Violet, the queen, pleaded with the king to allow her to see her people again. Because of his love for her, he granted her wish to visit them each spring. His only condition was that she could only return to them in the form of a flower for part of the year, coming back to her husband's icy realm each winter."

And so the violet has played its small role in history and legend. Few flowers have been so symbolic of the awakening year, earth's renewal, hope and the simple joys and sorrows of love.

I think Pound chose violets due to their fragility, wild nature and ability to stand in the wind of spring, thus symbolizing the free unchained spirit of girls and women in the whole world.

Though critics and scholars continue to argue over whether the true interpretation of this poem lies in mythology or is a lesson on childhood imagination, it is possible that Pound had both meanings in mind. Pound was probably using the well-known myth of Apollo and Daphne to relay a wider message about the way society looks at imagination and creativity.

3. Conclusions and suggestions

As Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said "A designer knows he has achieved perfection not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away." Pound mastered this technique, indeed there is nothing left to take away from a fourteen-lines poem with no verbs.

Who knows what Ezra Pound had in mind when he wrote his poems? Every reader gets his or her own interpretation, depending on his or her imagination, life experience and background knowledge. We just have to fill the gaps and **see**, not only **look at!**

Once put on paper, the work of art never comes to rest, it is worked on, twisted, analysed, discussed, questioned, every new reader comes with a new meaning, the text becomes the reader's. This is why some are reluctant to share their writing, due to fear of losing it.

I hope that, by explaining every step of how I make sense of poetry, I made it more accessible to many, especially Pound's poems which can be challenging and discouraging! My suggestion to all is not to read the critics first, try to see what it means to you first!

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