

William Pratt: On "In a Station of the Metro"

What Pound said he was attempting to make was a verbal equivalent for a moment of revelation accompanied by intense emotion: "In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective." Consciously or not, Pound here echoes the definition of sacrament in the Catechism of the English Book of Common Prayer as "the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." Thus, Pound's description of an imagist poem shows that it was an extension of religious symbolism, his modern counterpart for the moments of inspired emotion that had once resulted in Greek myths and medieval romances.

Of course, the image differs from myth and romance in being instantaneous, without story or sequence, seemingly independent of time and history. If it succeeds, it must make up in intensity for what it lacks in duration. Pound's "Metro" image consists of a single perception of beauty in the midst of ugliness; what makes it modern is the combination of the city as setting and the sense that it is a momentary experience, in the immediate present, now. In defining image in 1913, Pound added, "It is the presentation of such a 'complex' instantaneously which gives the sense of sudden liberation; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art." . . . This brief image, with its contrast of light and darkness, foreshadows the constant motif of the Cantos, where light and dark images are repeated in so many different forms that they become the equivalents of heaven and hell: "In the gloom, the gold gathers the light about it" of the early Canto 17 contrasts with "First came the seen, then thus the palpable / Elysium, though it were in the halls of hell" in the later Canto 81.

From *Singing the Chaos: Madness and Wisdom in Modern Poetry*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996. Copyright © 1996 by The Curators of the University of Missouri.

Publication Status:

[Excerpted Criticism](#) [1]

Publication:

- Private group -

Criticism Target:

[Ezra Pound](#) [2]

Author:

[William Pratt](#) [3]

Poem:

[In a Station of the Metro](#) [4]

Tags:

[religious symbolism](#) [5]

[concrete image](#) [6]

Source URL: <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/criticism/william-pratt-station-metro>

Links

[1] <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/category/publication-status/excerpted-criticism>

- [2] <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/poet/ezra-pound>
- [3] <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/creator/william-pratt>
- [4] <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/poem/station-metro>
- [5] <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/religious-symbolism>
- [6] <http://www.modernamericanpoetry.org/category/tags/concrete-image>