

Last week we began to consider the modernist poets that became prominent after World War I: Eliot, Williams, Stevens, Pound, MacLeish. They tended to be, for want of a better word, “austere” in their approach to poetry. Precise description, academic allusion, and emotional reticence were their characteristics. Modernism had another side that was far more passionate than intellectual. This week we shall be considering three poets who maintained the fervor of Romanticism while still making it new: Yeats, Cummings and Lawrence.

The painting by Robert Delaunay portrays the Eiffel Tower, completed in 1889 and enduring as a symbol of the new Modernism. Delaunay created a whole series of Red Tower paintings between 1909 and 1911. This particular one was revised in 1923.

**William Butler Yeats
(1865-1939)**

Yeats was born in Dublin of Anglo-Irish parents with roots in County Sligo. Educated in London, and then in Dublin, he was influenced by Oscar Wilde and William Pater. His natural lyricism caused his first books of poems to be very popular.

In the early years of the 20th Century he became enthusiastic about Irish nationalism. He fell in love with the beautiful revolutionary, Maud Gonne, to whom he repeatedly but unsuccessfully proposed marriage.



1908 Photograph G. B. Beresford

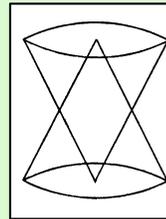
W. B. Yeats became famous toward the end of the 19th Century for his lyric poems. In the 20th Century his poetry took on new forms, and began to consider topics other than the romantic mainstays of love and death.

Like many poets Yeats was more successful in his art than in his love. He fell madly in love with Maud Gonne, but she would have him not. Yeats considered himself much like the earlier Irish poet Clarence Mangan. He wrote an article about Mangan's youthful love affair with a beautiful woman "who amused herself with his devotion and then whistled him down the wind." The term comes from falconry – the falcon is loosed and sent home (a falcon sent hunting is released against the wind).

Maud Gonne was far more independent and experienced than was Yeats. Before meeting Yeats she had had several affairs and an illegitimate child. She was an ardent Irish nationalist. She much preferred to act than to reflect, and had little truck with Yeats' mysticism and magic. Much to Yeats' chagrin, she married Major John MacBride in 1903. MacBride was often drunk and violent, and the marriage did not last. MacBride had fought against the British in the Boer War, leading the Irish Transvaal Brigade. He participated in the Easter Rising and was executed by the British in 1916.

A Vision

Yeats had long been interested in mysticism and the occult. As the war ended and the Irish Free State was established (with Yeats as a Senator), he became concerned with a general view of life and history. He examined these ideas through a fictional character named Michael Robartes, who had learned the secrets of the ancients. Yeats' 1925 book, *A Vision*, is difficult to follow. A central diagram showed two interconnecting cones (or vortices). These represent opposing forces such as the "will" and "thought." The point of the vortex is the present which expands toward eternity. Movement is through spirals or gyres. To spin (or "pern") in this way is how angels ascend and descend in the heavens.



Yeats was fascinated by the occult. In his early years in London he associated with Madame Blavatsky, a Russian occultist who had founded the Theosophical Society in 1875. She claimed to have been trained by *The Masters of the Ancient Wisdom* in Tibet. Although she did promote ancient Hindu teachings, most people ultimately considered her a charlatan. Yeats later developed his own spiritual system in *A Vision*.

The concepts underlying the vortices are complex. They contribute to the beginning of the poem *The Second Coming*;

The human soul is always moving outward into the objective world or inward into itself. ... The man in whom the movement inward is stronger than the movement outward ... reaches the narrow end of a gyre at death ... and has a moment of revelation ... which they describe as his being carried into the presence of all his dead kindred. (from Yeats' notes to the poem *The Second Coming*)

The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;



 Liam Clancy

After the Great War, many people felt that history was leading on to some great catastrophe. The end of the world was nigh. *The Second Coming* provides a poetic representation of this sense of coming doom. The poem describes the falcon circling in the vortices that connect thought and will. These cones are pulling apart.

The *Spiritus Mundi* is an imagined set of images. Yeats considered these as divinely granted to the poet to assist him in interpreting the world and prophesying the future.

In Christian theology, the Second Coming is the return of Christ to the world. At this time Christ will judge all the living and the dead, and will establish his Kingdom. In the Apocalyptic literature, the Second Coming is preceded by a period of plague, war, famine and destruction. During this time the Anti-Christ will falsely claim to be the Messiah.

It is not clear exactly who or what is Yeats' "rough beast." Does it represent the Anti-Christ, or one of the beasts foreseen by the prophet John in Revelations Chapter 13:

And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy (verse 1)

And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon. (verse 11)

Perhaps the poem should not be interpreted in terms of Christian eschatology (study of last things), but just as a prophecy of approaching doom.

The poem's most famous lines (after the rough Beast slouching toward Bethlehem) are

The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.



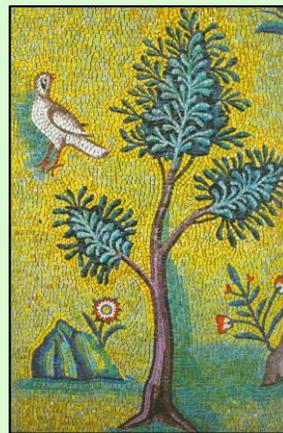
Yeats visited Ravenna in 1907 with Lady Gregory. This city on the East coast of Italy was the centre of Byzantine power in Italy. After the barbarian invasions, the power of Rome was abolished. However, the Byzantine (or Eastern Roman) Empire persisted until the early Middle Ages with its capital in Constantinople or Byzantium (present day Istanbul). Ravenna was the main connection between Constantinople and Italy. The city is full of beautiful churches, the interiors of which are covered with mosaics. The mosaics shown in this slide are from the *Basilica of Sant' Apollinare Nuovo* (504 CE) – they show the procession of the martyrs.

Long after Yeats's visit, the images from the Byzantine mosaics entered his poems:

O sages standing in God's holy fire
 As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
 Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
 And be the singing-masters of my soul.

O sages standing in God's holy fire
 As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
 Come from the holy fire, perne in a gyre,
 And be the singing-masters of my soul.
 Consume my heart away; sick with desire
 And fastened to a dying animal
 It knows not what it is; and gather me
 Into the artifice of eternity.

Once out of nature I shall never take
 My bodily form from any natural thing,
 But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
 Of hammered gold and gold enamelling
 To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
 Or set upon a golden bough to sing
 To lords and ladies of Byzantium
 Of what is past, or passing, or to come.



Denys Hawthorne

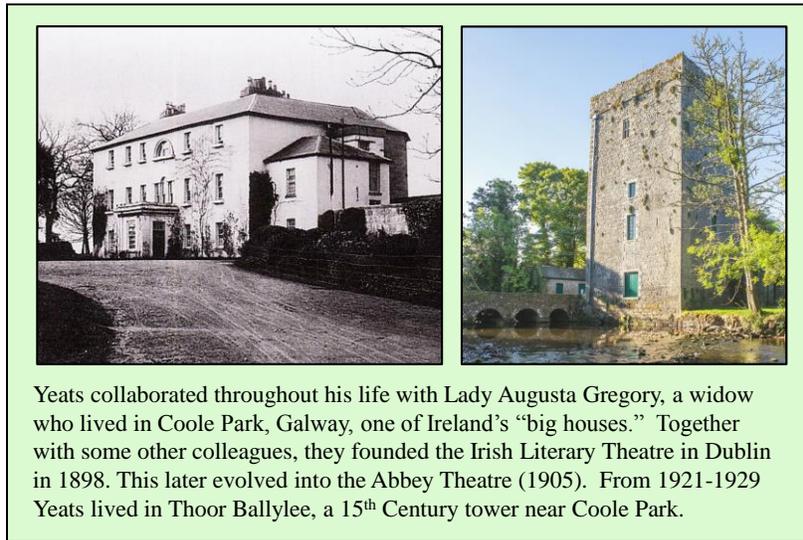
Yeats wrote two Byzantium poems: *Sailing to Byzantium* (1927) and *Byzantium* (1932). Both deal with the transience of life, and compare it to the persistence of art.

In *Sailing to Byzantium*, the poet feels old – like a “tattered coat upon a stick.” He must learn how to make something of himself that will last beyond his dying body. So he travels to Byzantium to learn how to sing, to be gathered “into the artifice of eternity.” Then he can be the eternal poet singing of “what is past, or passing or to come.”

The phrase “perne in a gyre” comes from the vortices as described in *A Vision*. The saints descend from their place in eternity to a point in time where they can become the poet’s singing-masters.

The poem is a glorious lament for life’s passing and the desire of the artist to make something that will last beyond his death. As such it echoes many of the sonnets of Shakespeare, e. g .

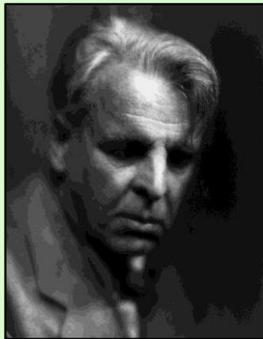
Not marble nor the gilded monuments
Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme;
But you shall shine more bright in these contents
Than unswept stone, besmear’d with sluttish time.



For several years Yeats lived in Thoor Ballylee. The river passing by the tower sinks underground to flow into the turloughs (seasonal lakes) of Coole Park. Wild swans are abundant on these lakes. Yeats considers the waters as a symbol of the soul and the swans to represent moments of inspiration. An earlier Irish poet Anthony Rafferty, had mentioned the dropping of the waters into the cellar of Ballylee. Lady Gregory’s house in Coole Park fell into ruin after her death in 1932 and was demolished in 1941. Coole Park is presently a nature reserve.



Another emblem there! That stormy white
 But seems a concentration of the sky;
 And, like the soul, it sails into the sight
 And in the morning's gone, no man knows why;
 And is so lovely that it sets to right
 What knowledge or its lack had set awry,
 So arrogantly pure, a child might think
 It can be murdered with a spot of ink



1933 Photograph,
 Pirie MacDonald

Cool Park and Ballylee



W. B. Yeats

We were the last romantics - chose for theme
 Traditional sanctity and loveliness;
 Whatever's written in what poets name
 The book of the people; whatever most can bless
 The mind of man or elevate a rhyme;
 But all is changed, that high horse riderless,
 Though mounted in that saddle Homer rode
 Where the swan drifts upon a darkening flood.

Yeats made few recordings. We shall hear part of the famous recording of *The Lake Isle of Innisfree* in a later session. In this recording he recites the middle two verses of *Cool Park and Ballylee*, those that deal with the ascending swan (the moment of inspiration that sets to right what knowledge or its lack had set awry) and the magnificence of the Coole House.

The last verse of the poem is the most famous. Yeats tells Lady Gregory that the two of them were the “last romantics.” Time has passed them by; Pegasus the symbol of poetry is rider-less; the swan of inspiration “drifts upon a darkening flood.”



e e cummings (1894-1962)

Edward Estlin Cummings was born in Cambridge, MA. His father was a teacher at Harvard and later a Congregationalist minister. After graduating from Harvard in 1917, Cummings went to France as a pacifist in an ambulance corps and was imprisoned by the French on suspicion of treason. Returning to the US after the war he began to paint, and to publish poetry. His poems are characterized by unconventional orthography. Throughout his life he stood for love and beauty and against stupidity and unkindness.

Self-portrait, 1950s?

The poetry of e e cummings is immediately recognizable by the way it looks. He uses unusual line lengths and unconventional orthography. His most characteristic signs are the comma between words with no additional space and the lower-case “i” which complements his lower-case signature.



i like my body when it is with your
body. It is so quite new a thing.
muscles better and nerves more.


Garrison Keillor

Cummings wrote some highly erotic poems. Some are about adulterous lust (*may I feel said he*) and some can be accused of treating woman as object (*She being Brand-new*, which compares

having sex with an inexperienced woman to breaking in a new car). Most, such as the one chosen to read by Garrison Keillor, provide beautiful descriptions of good sex.

The illustration is by Cummings, who painted throughout his life though he never became successful as a painter. The following website provides illustrations of the paintings:

<http://eecummingsart.com/>

<p>Spring is like a perhaps hand (which comes carefully out of Nowhere)arranging a window,into which people look(while people stare arranging and changing placing carefully there a strange thing and a known thing here)and changing everything carefully</p> <p>spring is like a perhaps Hand in a window (carefully to and fro moving New and Old things,while people stare carefully</p>		<p>moving a perhaps fraction of flower here placing an inch of air there)and without breaking anything</p>
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We have already considered William Carlos Williams' poem *Spring and All*. Williams is austere; Cummings is playful. He likens Spring to a person arranging objects in a shop window. Tentative, gentle and masterful.

Poetic Technique

The verse is free and lines may have no meter or length restriction. The end of the line is often used to focus attention:

only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses

Word order can be arbitrary, and ellipsis is common:

somewhere i have never travelled,gladly beyond
any experience,your eyes have their silence.

Punctuation means just what it is supposed to mean. Commas are not usually followed by a space. Parentheses indicate additional ideas:

as Spring opens
(touching skilfully,mysteriously)her first rose

The imagery is complicated and very condensed:

whose texture
compels me with the colour of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing

The poetry of e e cummings is completely free from the forms that poetry had previously fit itself to. About the only thing that distinguishes it from prose is that he uses lines. Some have suggested that the division of the text into lines is the defining feature of poetry. cummings sometimes uses the end of the line to accentuate an idea. At other times he can use it to provide two separate meanings. In the poem *old age sticks* the word “sticks” initially means “doesn’t run smoothly” but then the next line says “up” and “sticks up” means “erects.” For another example a line may end with “must” and the next line is “n’t.”

scolds Forbid
den
Stop
Must
n't Don't



This is a clip from Woody Allen's 1986 movie *Hannah and her Sisters*. Hannah's husband Elliot (played by Michael Caine) has become infatuated with Hannah's younger sister Lee (played by Barbara Hershey). They meet and spend a brief time in a bookstore. Elliot buys Lee a book of cummings' poetry, and professes his love for her through one of cummings' poems.

The background music is a jazz version of *Bewitched* (Rodgers and Hart) performed by the pianist Dick Hyman.

anyone lived in a pretty how town
 (with up so floating many bells down)
 spring summer autumn winter
 he sang his didn't he danced his did.

Women and men (both little and small)
 cared for anyone not at all
 they sowed their isn't they reaped their same
 sun moon stars rain

children guessed (but only a few
 and down they forgot as up they grew
 autumn winter spring summer)
 that noone loved him more by more




View from Patchin Place, 1960

This ballad is one of Cummings' greatest achievements. A play of names runs through the poem: the man is named "anyone" and the woman who loves him is named "noone." At the specific level the ballad tells a love story; at the general level it describes the fate of anyone who is loved by no one. Throughout the poem time is told by the bells that ring up and down, by the seasons that pass, by the hours and weathers of the day. We live but briefly. Most importantly we love our love.

The painting is of Patchin Place in Greenwich Village, where Cummings lived with Marion Moorehouse, a fashion model and photographer. Cummings had been transiently married twice but his most long-lasting relationship (from 1932 until his death in 1962) was with Marion.

old age sticks
 up Keep
 off
 signs)&

youth yanks them down(old
 age
 cries No

Tres)&(pas)
 youth laughs
 (sing



old age
 scolds Forbid
 den
 Stop
 Must
 n't Don't

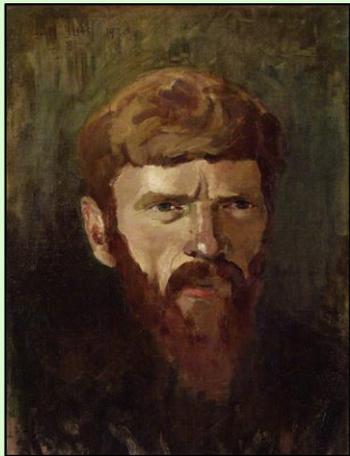
&)youth goes
 right on
 gr
 owing old.

The illustration shows the physical changes that occur from youth to age: the graying hair, the wrinkles, the jowls, the chicken-neck. The poem deals with how the old lay down rules against which the young rebel. Behind it all is the passage of time. The old become far more limited in what they can do than the limits they impose upon the young. Sometimes they forbid what they find no longer possible – you must not do what I cannot.

The disjointed structure of the poem heightens the antagonism and the ambivalence. Old Age slows down (sticks) but erects (sticks up) signs. Old age cries No but this is really just an assertion that they are in control (Notres is “ours”). And then there is the combination No +tres+pas+sing. Youth grows “gr” but cannot avoid growing old.



This is one of Cummings' paintings probably from the 1950s.



**David Herbert Lawrence
(1886-1930)**

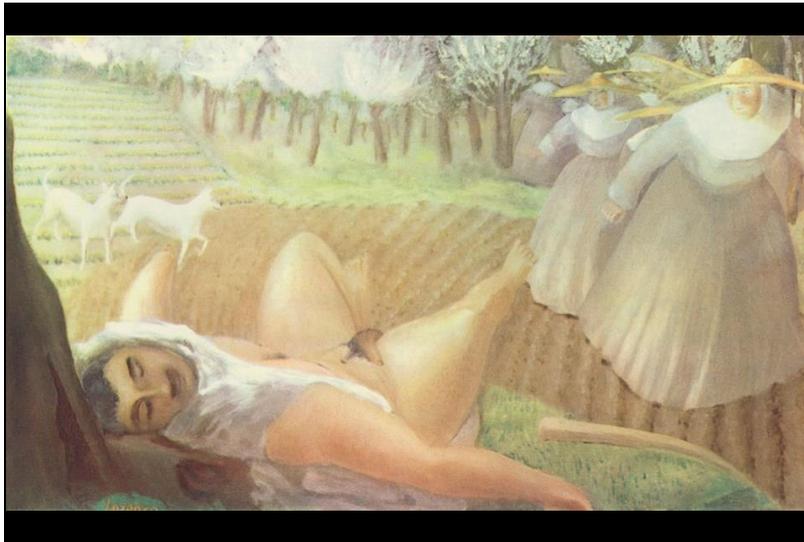
Lawrence's father was a collier and his mother a schoolteacher. He was sickly as a child – probably because of tuberculosis, though he never believed this. During World War I, he was suspected of treason because of his pacifism and his German wife. After the war he travelled extensively, spending long periods in Italy and in New Mexico. He died of TB in Venice, France, in 1930. He is most famous for his novels – *Sons and Lovers*, *Women in Love* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – but he also wrote short stories and poetry.

Portrait by Jan Juta, 1920



**Frieda Lawrence
(1879-1956)**

In 1912, Lawrence began a passionate affair with the wife of his tutor at the University of Nottingham – Frieda Weekley (née von Richthofen). They were married in 1914. They endured much persecution in England during World War I, and went into voluntary exile when the war ended.



Lawrence was famous for the freedom with which he represented the sexual relations between man and woman.

This is one of D. H. Lawrence's paintings (*Boccaccio Story*), which illustrates a tale from the *Decameron* (14th Century): Masetto becomes the gardener for a convent by pretending to be deaf and dumb. He introduces the nuns to the pleasures of sex. They are intrigued, and comforted that he cannot tell of their sins. However, he becomes overtired by his exertions, and has to complain vocally to the abbess. The Abbess proposes that they set up an easier sexual schedule. The nuns then claim that his regaining of speech was a miracle brought on by their prayers.

Lawrence's exhibited his paintings in London in 1929. They were promptly censored. England was quite late in developing any modern sense of sex. An unexpurgated version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (initially published in a private edition in 1928) was not published in England until 1960 when a jury found that it was not obscene.



Alec
McCowen



A snake came to my water-trough
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,
To drink there.

Lawrence's poem *The Snake* was written when he was staying in Taormina in Sicily. The poem deals with various ideas. Man as unable to confront nature appropriately because of the foolish fears that have been taught him. Man, the supposed greatest of the animals, as actually the most petty and vindictive. The poem harkens back to the Garden of Eden. It also echoes Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, wherein a sailor stupidly kills the albatross – and has to expiate his sin. The poem is in free verse. The sound is marvelous. The s sounds

He sipped with his straight mouth,
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,
Silently.





He drank enough
And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken,
And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air, so black,

Lawrence is extremely accurate in his perceptions. He followed the Imagists in portraying what he experienced.

Lawrence collected many of his later short poems together into a book called *Pansies* (1929) – a pun on the *Pensées* of Pascal. Some like *Self-Pity* are indeed brief. Others are very similar to the Imagist poems – *Harvest Moon* recalls T. E. Hulme's *Autumn* (which we considered in the session Twentieth Century Shorts I).

Although hard-pressed to demonstrate obscenity, the censors still insisted on banning the publication of *Pansies*. They were upset by his honest approach to human sexuality:

If you want to have sex, you've got to trust
at the core of your heart the other creature.



There are no recordings of D. H. Lawrence's voice. This reading is by Frieda Lawrence in about 1950.

The poem describes Bavarian Gentians. Michaelmas is a period in the Church calendar that begins with the Feast of St Michael on the 29 September. September is the time when Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, the Harvest Goddess must return to Pluto in the underworld (Hades or Dis). Lawrence wrote this poem just before his own death – he is asking for a torch whereby to light his way into the afterlife.

Many of his writings from this time concerned death. The story *The Man Who Died* (1929) reinterprets the resurrection of Christ in terms of a pagan worldview: Jesus comes back to enjoy life.



Now it is autumn and the falling fruit
and the long journey towards oblivion.

Paul Cézanne, 1878

The apples falling like great drops of dew
to bruise themselves an exit from themselves.

Tom O'Bedlam



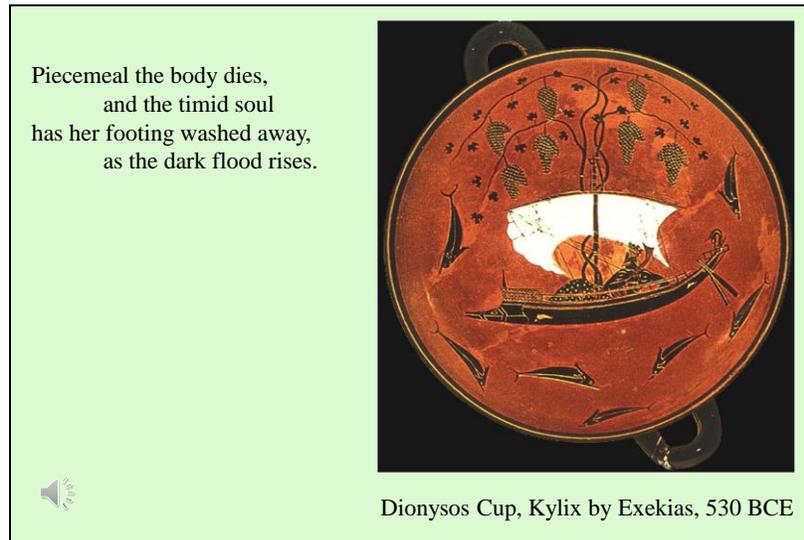
In 1927, two years before he died, D. H. Lawrence travelled through the Etruscan region of Italy north of Rome. He hated the fascism of Mussolini's Italy and likened it to the impersonal civilization of Ancient Rome. He considered the Etruscans to be a noble and vital civilization that had been crushed by the Romans. He was intrigued by the paintings in the Etruscan tombs which portrayed the afterlife as a period of feasting and dancing. In his book *Etruscan Places* (published posthumously in 1932), he described how a tomb at Cerveteri contained the little bronze ship of death that should bear him over to the other world, the vases of jewels for his arraying, the vases of small dishes, the little bronze statuettes and tools, the weapons, the armour: all the amazing impedimenta of the important dead.

The Ship of Death is a glorious incantation of coming death. The poet does not fight – the poem is one of acceptance and relief. Lawrence believed in the pre-Christian ideas of death. One died and was reincarnated – just like autumn goes through winter and becomes spring again..

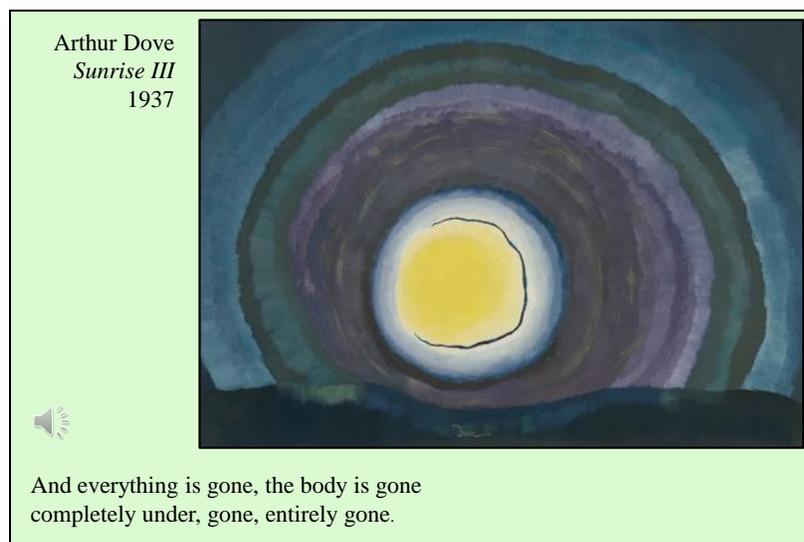
The poem begins with autumn and the falling apples. This has some similarities to Frost's *After Apple-Picking* (session IB). However, Frost is harvesting the apples whereas Lawrence is watching them fall.

The poem is read by Tom O'Bedlam. The name refers to the insane asylum Bethlem Royal Hospital. Once released the inmates would wander around the country as beggars. Edgar in *King Lear* refers to himself as Tom O'Bedlam.

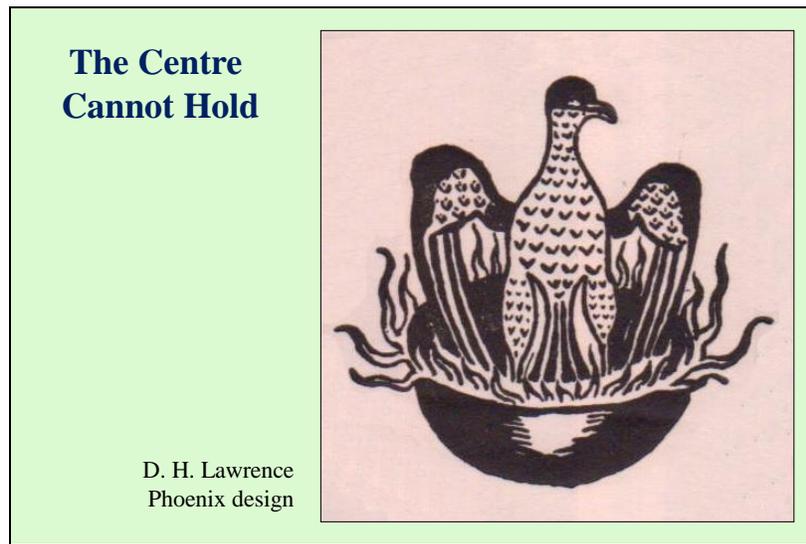
Tom O'Bedlam has a wonderful voice for reading poetry. Other readings can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/user/SpokenVerse>



The illustration shows a Greek kylix (wine bowl). This was found in an Etruscan tomb at Vulci. Exactly what is represented is not known. The god in the ship is Dionysus (Bacchus). The dolphins may represent immortality and reincarnation. The grapes represent the way in which the god of wine was worshipped.



The painting is by Arthur Dove (1880-1946) one of the great American modernist painters. He is often considered the first American abstract painter, though most of his paintings are not completely abstract.



The design of the Phoenix was made by Lawrence to encapsulate his idea of life. Death leads only to new life. The design was placed on his gravestone in Vence. Frieda later had his body exhumed and cremated. The ashes were then brought to Taos, New Mexico.