

# **H. S. Mauberley (Life and Contacts)**

Ezra Loomis Pound

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# H. S. Mauberley (Life and Contacts)

## Ezra Loomis Pound

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"Vocat aestus in umbram"

Nemesianus Es. IV.

E. P. Ode pour l'élection de son sépulchre

I

For three years, out of key with his time,  
He strove to resuscitate the dead art  
Of poetry; to maintain "the sublime"  
In the old sense. Wrong from the start

No, hardly, but, seeing he had been born  
In a half savage country, out of date;  
Bent resolutely on wringing lilies from the acorn;  
Capaneus; trout for factitious bait:

*"Idmen gar toi panth, os eni Troie*  
Caught in the unstopped ear;  
Giving the rocks small lee-way  
The chopped seas held him, therefore, that year.

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

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Unaffected by "the march of events",  
He passed from men's memory in *l'an trentiesme*  
*De son eage*; the case presents  
No adjunct to the Muses' diadem.

### II.

The age demanded an image  
Of its accelerated grimace,  
Something for the modern stage,  
Not, at any rate, an Attic grace;

Not, not certainly, the obscure reveries  
Of the inward gaze;  
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.

### III.

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

Christ follows Dionysus,  
Phallic and ambrosial  
Made way for macerations;  
Caliban casts out Ariel.

All things are a flowing,  
Sage Heraclitus says;  
But a tawdry cheapness  
Shall reign throughout our days.

Even the Christian beauty  
Defects after Samothrace;  
We see *to kalon*  
Decreed in the market place.

Faun's flesh is not to us,  
Nor the saint's vision.  
We have the press for wafer;  
Franchise for circumcision.

All men, in law, are equals.  
Free of Peisistratus,  
We choose a knave or an eunuch  
To rule over us.

A bright Apollo,

*tin andra, tin eroa, tina theon,*  
What god, man, or hero  
Shall I place a tin wreath upon?

#### IV.

These fought, in any case,  
and some believing, pro domo, in any case ..

Some quick to arm,  
some for adventure,  
some from fear of weakness,  
some from fear of censure,  
some for love of slaughter, in imagination,  
learning later ...

some in fear, learning love of slaughter;  
Died some pro patria, non dulce non et decor" ..

walked eye-deep in hell  
believing in old men's lies, then unbelieving  
came home, home to a lie,  
home to many deceits,  
home to old lies and new infamy;

usury age-old and age-thick  
and liars in public places.

Daring as never before, wastage as never before.  
Young blood and high blood,  
Fair cheeks, and fine bodies;

fortitude as never before

frankness as never before,  
disillusions as never told in the old days,  
hysterias, trench confessions,  
laughter out of dead bellies.

**V.**

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

Charm, smiling at the good mouth,  
Quick eyes gone under earth's lid,

For two gross of broken statues,  
For a few thousand battered books.

**VI. Yeux Glauques**

Gladstone was still respected,  
When John Ruskin produced  
"Kings Treasuries"; Swinburne  
And Rossetti still abused.

Fœtid Buchanan lifted up his voice  
When that faun's head of hers  
Became a pastime for  
Painters and adulterers.

The Burne-Jones cartons  
Have preserved her eyes;  
Still, at the Tate, they teach  
Cophetua to rhapsodize;

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,  
Questing and passive ....  
"Ah, poor Jenny's case" ...

Bewildered that a world  
Shows no surprise  
At her last maquero's  
Adulteries.

**VII. "Siena Mi Fe', Disfecemi Maremma"**

Among the pickled fœtuses and bottled bones,  
Engaged in perfecting the catalogue,  
I found the last scion of the

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Senatorial families of Strasbourg, Monsieur Verog.

For two hours he talked of Gallifet;  
Of Dowson; of the Rhymers' Club;  
Told me how Johnson (Lionel) died  
By falling from a high stool in a pub ...

But showed no trace of alcohol  
At the autopsy, privately performed  
Tissue preserved the pure mind  
Arose toward Newman as the whiskey warmed.

Dowson found harlots cheaper than hotels;  
Headlam for uplift; Image impartially imbued  
With raptures for Bacchus, Terpsichore and the Church.  
So spoke the author of "The Dorian Mood",

M. Verog, out of step with the decade,  
Detached from his contemporaries,  
Neglected by the young,  
Because of these reveries.

## VIII. Brennbaum.

*The* sky-like limpid eyes,  
The circular infant's face,  
The stiffness from spats to collar  
Never relaxing into grace;

The heavy memories of Horeb, Sinai and the forty years,  
Showed only when the daylight fell  
Level across the face  
Of Brennbaum "The Impeccable".

## IX. Mr. Nixon

In the cream gilded cabin of his steam yacht  
Mr. Nixon advised me kindly, to advance with fewer  
Dangers of delay. "Consider  
Carefully the reviewer.

"I was as poor as you are;  
"When I began I got, of course,  
"Advance on royalties, fifty at first", said Mr. Nixon,  
"Follow me, and take a column,  
"Even if you have to work free.

"Butter reviewers. From fifty to three hundred  
"I rose in eighteen months;  
"The hardest nut I had to crack

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"Was Dr. Dundas.

"I never mentioned a man but with the view

"Of selling my own works.

"The tip's a good one, as for literature

"It gives no man a sinecure."

And no one knows, at sight a masterpiece.

And give up verse, my boy,

There's nothing in it."

\* \* \*

Likewise a friend of Bloughram's once advised me:

Don't kick against the pricks,

Accept opinion. The "Nineties" tried your game

And died, there's nothing in it.

**X.**

Beneath the sagging roof  
The stylist has taken shelter,  
Unpaid, uncelebrated,  
At last from the world's welter

Nature receives him,  
With a placid and uneducated mistress  
He exercises his talents  
And the soil meets his distress.

The haven from sophistications and contentions  
Leaks through its thatch;  
He offers succulent cooking;  
The door has a creaking latch.

**XI.**

"Conservatrix of Milésien"  
Habits of mind and feeling,  
Possibly. But in Ealing  
With the most bank-clerkly of Englishmen?

No, "Milésian" is an exaggeration.  
No instinct has survived in her  
Older than those her grandmother  
Told her would fit her station.



**XII.**

"Daphne with her thighs in bark  
Stretches toward me her leafy hands",  
Subjectively. In the stuffed-satin drawing-room  
I await The Lady Valentine's commands,

Knowing my coat has never been  
Of precisely the fashion  
To stimulate, in her,  
A durable passion;

Doubtful, somewhat, of the value  
Of well-gowned approbation  
Of literary effort,  
But never of The Lady Valentine's vocation:

Poetry, her border of ideas,  
The edge, uncertain, but a means of blending  
With other strata  
Where the lower and higher have ending;

A hook to catch the Lady Jane's attention,  
A modulation toward the theatre,  
Also, in the case of revolution,  
A possible friend and comforter.

\* \* \*

Conduct, on the other hand, the soul  
"Which the highest cultures have nourished"  
To Fleet St. where  
Dr. Johnson flourished;

Beside this thoroughfare  
The sale of half-hose has  
Long since superseded the cultivation  
Of Pierian roses.