I. Dall’Imagismo al Modernismo

Fine versus Inizio

Ezra Pound (1885-1972)
From Harold Monro (July 1932)

“At a particular date” [i.e. about 1917?], Pound and Eliot made a famous decision, described later by Pound in his essay Harold Monro (The Criterion 11.45, July 1932, pp. 581-592):

That is to say, at a particular date [i.e. about 1917?] in a particular room, two authors, neither engaged in picking the other’s pocket, decided that the dilutation of vers libre, Amygism, Lee Masterism, general floppiness had gone too far and that some counter-current must be set going. Parallel situation centuries ago in China. Remedy prescribed ‘Émaux et Camées’ (or the Bay State Hymn Book). Rhyme and regular strophes.

Results: Poems in Mr. Eliot’s second volume, not contained in his first (‘Prufrock’, Egoist, 1917), also ‘H. S. Mauberley’.

Divergence later.

F. S. Flint (1885-1960)
The History Of Imagism (From The Egoist, May 1, 1915, pp. 70-71)

Somewhere in the gloom of the year 1908 Mr. T. E. Hulme, now in the trenches of Ypres, but excited then by the propinquity, at a half-a-crown distance, of the other sex […] proposed to a companion that they should found a Poets’ Club. The thing was done, there and then. The Club began to dine; and its members to read their verses. At the end of the year they published a small plaquette of them, called “For Christmas MDCCCCVIII”. In this plaquette was printed one of the first “Imagist” poems, by T. E. Hulme:

AUTUMN
A touch of cold in the Autumn night –
I walked abroad
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge
Like a red-faced farmer.
I did not stop to speak, but nodded,
And round about were the wistful stars
With white faces like town children.

In November of the same year, Edward Storer, author already of “Inclinations,” much of which is in the “Imagist” manner, published his “Mirrors of Illusion,” the first book of “Imagist” poems, with an essay at the end attacking poetic conventions. The first poem in the book was called “Image,” here it is:

Forsaken lovers,
Burning to a chaste white moon,
Upon strange pyres of loneliness and drought.

Mr. Storer, who has recanted much since, was in favour then of a poetry which I described, in reference to his book, as “a form of expression, like the Japanese, in which an image is the resonant heart of an exquisite moment.” […]

At that time, I had been advocating in the course of a series of articles on recent books of verse a poetry in vers libre, akin in spirit to the Japanese. An attack on the Poets’ Club brought me into correspondence and acquaintance with T. E. Hulme; and, later on, after Hulme had violently disagreed with the Poet’s Club, and had left it, he proposed that he should get together a few congenial spirits, and
that we should have weekly meetings in a Soho restaurant. The first of these meetings, which were really the successors of certain Wednesday evening meetings, took place on Thursday, March 25, 1909. There were present, so far as I recall, T. Hulme, Edward Storer, F. W. Tancred, Joseph Campbell, Miss Florence Farr, one or two other men, mere vagueums in my memory, and myself. I think that what brought the real nucleus of this group together was a dissatisfaction with English poetry as it was then (and is still, alas!) being written. We proposed to replace it by pure vers libre; by the Japanese tanka and haikai; we all wrote dozens of the latter as an amusement; by poems in a sacred Hebrew form, of which “This is the House that Jack Built” is a perfect model; Joseph Campbell produced two good specimens of this, one of which, “The Dark,” is printed in “The Mountainy Singer”; by rhymeless poems like Hulme’s “Autumn,” and so on. In all this Hulme was ringleader. He insisted too on absolutely accurate presentation and no verbiage; and he and F. W. Tancred, a poet too little known, perhaps because his production is precious and small, used to spend hours each day in the search for the right phrase. Tancred does it still; while Hulme reads German philosophy in the trenches, waiting for the general advance. There was also a lot of talk and practice among us, Storer leading it chiefly, of what we called the Image. We were very much influenced by modern French symbolist poetry.

On April 22, 1909, Ezra Pound, whose book, “Personae,” had been published on the previous Friday, joined the group, introduced, I believe, by Miss Farr and my friend T. D. FitzGerald. […] The group died a lingering death at the end of its second winter. But its discussions had a sequel. In 1912 Mr. Pound published, at the end of his book “Ripostes,” the complete poetical works of T. E. Hulme, five poems, thirty-three lines, with a preface in which these words occur: “As for the future, Les Imagistes, the descendants of the forgotten school of 1909 (previously referred to as the ‘School of Images’) have that in their keeping.” In that year, Pound had become interested in modern French poetry; he had broken away from his old manner; and he invented the term “Imagisme” to designate the aesthetic of “Les Imagistes.” In March 1913, an “interview,” over my signature, of an ‘imagiste’ appeared in the American review Poetry, followed by “A Few Don’t’s by an Imagiste” by Ezra Pound. […]

Towards the end of the year Pound collected together a number of poems [by] different writers, Richard Aldington, H.D., F. S. Flint. Skipwith Cannell, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, James Joyce, John Crowes, Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Heuffer and Allan Upward, and in February-March 1914 they were published in America and England as “Des Imagistes: An Anthology,” which, though it did not set the Thames, seems to have set America, on fire.

I precursori

CARL SANDBURG (1878–1967)
Letters to Dead Imagists (From Chicago Poems, 1916)

EMILY DICKINSON:
YOU gave us the bumble bee who has a soul,
The everlasting traveler among the hollyhocks,
And how God plays around a back yard garden.

STEVIE CRANE:
War is kind and we never knew the kindness of war till you came;
Nor the black riders and clashes of spear and shield out of the sea,
Nor the mumblings and shots that rise from dreams on call.
EMILY DICKINSON (1830-1886)

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The thought beneath so slight a film –
Is more distinctly seen –
As laces just reveal the surge –
Or Mists – the Apennine.

EMILY DICKINSON (1830-1886)

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When Night is almost done –
And Sunrise grows so near
That we can touch the Spaces –
It’s time to smooth the Hair –

And get the Dimples ready –
And wonder we could care
For that old – faded Midnight –
That frightened – but an Hour –

STEPHEN CRANE (1871-1900)

From *The Black Riders and Other Lines*, 1895

I

BLACK RIDERS CAME FROM THE SEA.
THERE WAS CLANG AND CLANG OF SPEAR AND SHIELD,
AND CLASH AND CLASH OF HOOF AND HEEL,
WILD SHOUTS AND THE WAVE OF HAIR
IN THE RUSH UPON THE WIND:
THUS THE RIDE OF SIN.

VI

GOD FASHIONED THE SHIP OF THE WORLD CAREFULLY.
WITH THE INFINITE SKILL OF AN ALL-MASTER
MADE HE THE HULL AND THE SAILS,
HELD HE THE RUDDER
READY FOR ADJUSTMENT.
ERECT STOOD HE, SCANNING HIS WORK PROUDLY.
THEN – AT FATEFUL TIME – A WRONG CALLED,
AND GOD TURNED,

LO, THE SHIP, AT THIS OPPORTUNITY, SLIPPED SLYLY,
MAKING CUNNING NOISELESS TRAVEL DOWN THE WAYS.
SO THAT, FOREVER RUDDERLESS, IT WENT UPON THE SEAS
GOING RIDICULOUS VOYAGES,
MAKING QUAIN'T PROGRESS,
TURNING AS WITH SERIOUS PURPOSE
BEFORE STUPID WINDS.
AND THERE WERE MANY IN THE SKY
WHO LAUGHED AT THIS THING.

IN publishing his Complete Poetical Works at thirty, Mr Hulme has set an enviable example to many of his contemporaries who have had less to say.

They are reprinted here for good fellowship; for good custom, a custom out of Tuscany and of Provence; and thirdly, for convenience, seeing their smallness of bulk; and for good memory, seeing that they recall certain evenings and meetings of two years gone, dull enough at the time, but rather pleasant to look back upon.

As for the “School of Images” which may or may not have existed, its principles were not so interesting as those of the “inherent dynamists” or of Les Unanimistes, yet they were probably sounder than those of a certain French school which attempted to dispense with verbs altogether; or of the Impressionists who brought forth:

“Pink pigs blossoming upon the hillside”;
or of the Post-Impressionists who beseech their ladies to let down slate-blue hair over their raspberry-coloured flanks.

Ardoise rimed richly – ah, richly and rarely rimed! – with framboise.

As for the future, Les Imagistes, the descendants of the forgotten school of 1909, have that in their keeping.

I refrain from publishing my proposed Historical Memoir of their forerunners, because Mr Hulme has threatened to print the original propaganda.

Ezra Pound (1885-1972)

Above the Dock

Above the quiet dock in midnight,
Tangled in the tall mast’s corded height,
Hangs the moon. What seemed so far away
Is but a child’s balloon forgotten after play.
(1912)
Imagism (1912-1917)

(From Poetry, March 1913)

The three principles of Imagism:

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 the sequence of the metronome.

Definition of “Image”

An “Image” is that which presents an intellectual and emotional “complex” in an instant of time. ... It is the presentation of such a “complex” instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art. It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works.

EZRA POUND (1885-1972)

Vorticism
(From Fortnightly Review, 96 [n.s.], 1 September 1914).

What I have said of one vorticist art can be transposed for another vorticist art. But let me go on then with my own branch of vorticism, about which I can probably speak with greater clarity. All poetic language is the language of exploration. Since the beginning of bad writing, writers have used images as ornaments. The point of Imagisme is that it does not use images as ornaments. The image is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language. I once saw a small child go to an electric light switch and say, “Mamma, can I open the light?” She was using the age-old language of exploration, the language of art. It was a sort of metaphor, but she was not using it as ornamentation. One is tired of ornamentations, they are all a trick, and any sharp person can learn them. The Japanese have had the sense of exploration. They have understood the beauty of this sort of knowing. A Chinaman said long ago that if a man can’t say what he has to say in twelve lines he had better keep quiet. The Japanese have evolved the still shorter form of the hokku.

The fallen blossom flies back to its branch:
A butterfly.

That is the substance of a very well-known hokku. Victor Plarr tells me that once, when he was walking over snow with a Japanese naval officer, they came to a place where a cat had crossed the path, and the officer said, “Stop, I am making a poem.” Which poem was, roughly, as follows:

The footsteps of the cat upon the snow:
(are like) plum-blossoms.

The words “are like” would not occur in the original, but I add them for clarity.

The “one image poem” is a form of super-position, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another. I found it useful in getting out of the impasse in which I had been left by my metro emotion. I wrote a thirty-line poem, and destroyed it because it was what we call work “of second intensity.” Six months later I made a poem half that length; a year later I made the following hokku-like sentence:
The apparition of these faces in the crowd:
Petals, on a wet, black bough.
[1913, 1916]

I dare say it is meaningless unless one has drifted into a certain vein of thought.* 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.

**EZRA POUND (1885-1972)**

*In a Station of the Metro*

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.
(1913, 1916)

**EZRA POUND (1885-1972)**

*Alba*

As cool as the pale wet leaves
of lily-of-the-valley
She lay beside me in the dawn.
(1913, 1916)

**H.D. (HILDA DOOLITTLE, 1886-1961)**

*Oread*

Whirl up, sea –
Whirl your pointed pines,
Splash your great pines
On our rocks,
Hurl your green over us,
Cover us with your pools of fir.
(1914, 1924)

* Mr. Flint and Mr. Bodker have made longer poems depending on a similar presentation of matter. So also have Richard Aldington, in his *In Via Sestina*, and “H. D.” in her *Oread*, which latter poems express much stronger emotions than that in my lines here given. Mr. Hueffer gives an interesting account of a similar adventure of his own in his review of the Imagiste anthology.
“Amygism”

**AMY LOWELL (1874-1925)**

_**In a Garden**_

Gushing from the mouths of stone men  
To spread at ease under the sky  
In granite-lipped basins,  
Where iris dabble their feet  
And rustle to a passing wind,  
The water fills the garden with its rushing,  
In the midst of the quiet of close-clipped lawns.

Damp smell the ferns in tunnels of stone,  
Where trickle and plash the fountains,  
Marble fountains, yellowed with much water.

Splashing down moss-tarnished steps  
It falls, the water;  
And the air is throbbing with it;  
With its gurgling and running;  
With its leaping, and deep, cool murmur.

And I wished for night and you.  
I wanted to see you in the swimming-pool,  
White and shining in the silver-flecked water.  
While the moon rode over the garden,  
High in the arch of night,  
And the scent of the lilacs was heavy with stillness.

Night and the water, and you in your whiteness, bathing!  
(1914)

**AMY LOWELL (1874-1925)**

_**White And Green**_

HEY! My daffodil-crowned,  
Slim and without sandals!  
As the sudden spurt of flame upon darkness  
So my eyeballs are startled with you.  
Supple-limbed youth among the fruit-trees,  
Light runner through tasselled orchards.  
You are an almond flower unsheathed  
Leaping and flickering between the budded branches.  
(1914)

**AMY LOWELL (1874-1925)**

_**Aubade**_

As I would free the white almond from the green husk  
So would I strip your trappings off,  
Beloved.  
And fingering the smooth and polished kernel  
I should see that in my hands glittered a gem beyond counting.  
(1914)
“Lee Masterism”

EDGAR LEE MASTERS (1868-1950)

*Trainor, The Druggist*

Only the chemist can tell, and not always the chemist,
what will result from compounding
Fluids or solids.
And who can tell
How men and women will interact
On each other, or what children will result?
There were Benjamin Pantier and his wife,
Good in themselves, but evils toward each other:
He oxygen, she hydrogen,
Their son, a devastating fire.
I Trainor, the druggist, a mixer of chemicals,
Killed while making an experiment,
Lived unwedded.
(1915, 1916)

EDGAR LEE MASTERS (1868-1950)

*Francis Turner*

I could not run or play
in boyhood.
In manhood I could only sip the cup,
Not drink –
For scarlet-fever left my heart diseased.
Yet I lie here
Soothed by a secret none but Mary knows:
There is a garden of acacia,
Catalpa trees, and arbors sweet with vines
There on that afternoon in June
By Mary’s side –
Kissing her with my soul upon my lips
It suddenly took flight.
(1915, 1916)
Other voices

JAMES JOYCE (1882-1941)
A Flower Given to My Daughter
Frail the white rose and frail are
Her hands that gave
Whose soul is sere and paler
Than time’s wan wave.
Rosefrail and fair – yet frailest
A wonder wild
In gentle eyes thou veilest,
My blueveined child.
(Trieste 1913, 1917)

ROBERT FROST (1874-1963)
The Pasture
I’m going out to clean the pasture spring;
I’ll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I shan’t be gone long – You come too.
I’m going out to fetch the calf
That’s standing by the mother. It’s so young
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I shan’t be gone long – You come too.
(1913)

EDWARD THOMAS (1878-1917)
The Cherry Trees
The cherry trees bend over and are shedding,
On the old road where all that passed are dead,
Their petals, strewing the grass as for a wedding
This early May morn when there is none to wed.
(May 1916, 1917)

CARL SANDBURG (1878-1967)
Fog
The fog comes
on little cat feet.
It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.
(1916)
William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)

*The Red Wheelbarrow*

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens
(1923)

William Carlos Williams (1883-1963)

*Between Walls*

the back wings
of the

hospital where
nothing

will grow lie
cinders

in which shine
the broken

pieces of a green
bottle
(1934)