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The Imagist Movement In America: History And Development

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THE IMAGIST MOVEMENT IN AMERICA

History and Development.

by

Helen Christie Malcolm.
THE IMAGIST MOVEMENT IN AMERICA.

Thesis presented to the Graduate Council of the Kansas State Teachers College of Hays in accordance with requirements for a Master of Science degree, by Helen Christie Malcolm, B.S.
INTRODUCTION.

The commercial age in America, coupled with the World war, has had no less influence in the field of poetic values than in the field of business. In the following pages I have attempted to show that the outlook of modern poetry is both natural and purposeful as a result of its environment and background; that, though unstable and variable at the present, it is gradually attaining through various short-lived movements, a degree of finish and crystallization; and that the entire outlook is a presage, a finger pointing in the direction of a fuller, richer cultural life that shall come to birth in America.

I wish to extend my thanks to the following persons for their kind help in securing books and material, and for suggestions in outlining and preparing the manuscript: Dr. R.R. Naegregor, Mr. Floyd B. Streeter, Miss Bischoff, Miss Brown, and Miss Louise Baird.
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"Not today is to justify me and answer what I am for,
But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater
than before known,
Arousè! for you must justify me."

-----Walt Whitman.

Not to the entombed volumes of century-steeped Europe,
nor to the culture-flavored art of her master traditions, did
the eagle-eyes of that fledgling brood of autochthonous poets
of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century turn, but to
the vast strength of the slumbering prairies, the purple fast-
nesses of rugged mountains, and the crude frankness of new-built
cities—turned and beheld with clear eyes the limitless literary
continent first proclaimed to a dogmatic world by that beloved
pioneer, the virile, indomitable Walt.

Young America found a voice and spoke with the naive
gravity characteristic of the adolescent. True to natural tend-
encies, this newly audible stripling blundered through myriad
experiments, chuckling with youthful wisdom at the horrified
stares of the critics and the up-flung hands of a much bewildered
public. Shades of Shakespeare, Dante, and Goethe! What was this
uncouth youngster blindly attempting to do? And now, though more
than a quarter of a century since the first astonished gasps, the
critics are still attempting to explain this thriving paradox in
the reverenced language of the ancients.
With the advent of Vachel Lindsay, Carl Sandburg, Edgar Lee Masters, Edwin Markham, William Vaughn Moody, and George Sterling, the literary center of America moved from the Hub of the Universe to the City of the Big Shoulders, though Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, and Amy Lowell staunchly continued to uphold the New England tradition.

In scanning the literary horizon, Alfred Kreymborg reports the following situation:

"New names came up with amazing rapidity and variety. Some of the boldest have vanished or diminished; some of the slowest and least showy have persevered and prevailed. Personally, I like to set the dawn of the renascence around 1912, without losing sight of the men and women who emerged just before. This was the year a number of experimental ventures opened their covers to poets who could not wedge their way into the old, commercial magazines. With the advent of THE LYRIC YEAR and THE NEW REPUBLIC in New York, of POETRY and THE LITTLE REVIEW in Chicago, of THE POETRY JOURNAL in Boston, supported by the anthological activities of William Stanley Braithwaite, Jessie B. Rittenhouse and others, and by The Poetry Society Of America and its tributaries, the young unknowns were greeted by a growing audience. THE POETRY MAGAZINE, led by Harriet Monroe, adopted Whitman's maxim: "To have great poets you must have great audiences."

This redoubtable woman, more than any other editor, devoted her

life to the cause of American poetry. The next few years brought further ventures into the field: THE SEVEN ARTS, CONTEMPORARY VERSE, THE FREEMAN and OTHERS. And among the sudden host of young publishers, Kennerley, Knopf, the Bonis, Liveright, Harcourt, Seltzer and others were important links in encouraging the new movement, and were joined by such older firms as Macmillan's, Harper's, Houghton Mifflin. The daily papers developed larger departments of literary criticism; poets were assured of a more competent, if not perfect, consideration of their work. Not the least stimulating factors were the controversies of the time. Though conservatives held the posts of honor and had the last word in the press, Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell had no difficulty in gaining publicity for their respective ideals. Most of the radicals had little or nothing to say outside their poetry; charges brought against them were taken up by Pound and Miss Lowell. It is a matter of delight to recall that most of the outcries came from conservative camps and that most of the battles were fought, not between poets, but critics. At times a conservative poet put on the critic's armor; the earlier leaders of such warfare were Louis Untermeyer and Conrad Aiken. Nor did the outbreak of the World War subdue the ardor of poets and critics. The heights of the renascence were scaled during 1915, '16 and '17.

When order finally appeared in the field of poetic upheaval and subsequent chaos, a brilliant group of youthful veterans had taken forward positions in defense of the new continent. Appearing for the first time during the years 1912 to '18, we find the names of Conrad Aiken, William Rose and Stephen Vincent Benet, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Louis and Jean Starr Untermeyer, James Oppenheim, Maxwell Bodenheim, Ezra Pound, H.D., John Gould Flet-

In this arbitrary grouping many poets of more or less worth have necessarily been omitted in consideration of space. Of those included, there is to be found no poet without a justifiable claim to recognition in one line of merit or another, but there is also to be found no poet of undisputable greatness. Conrad Aiken refers to them as "a host of pigmies" who "sing in chorus rather than singly."

The national movement began with no one name or locality but, with a mutual impulse, this fledgling host began to sing, individually and collectively, in every part of the vast continent, songs, which, though widely differing in tone-color and beauty, were strangely alike in mood and meaning to those who paused to listen. It became necessary to guard against such interchangeable terms as radical and conservative. Often the most radical ideas were expressed in the most classic of metres, and vice versa.

And the songs have continued with growing volume and self-confidence. No one voice is heard alone—all are joined in a harmonious chorus. Let us earnestly hope that the near future will see the coming of a great voice fitted to sing with magnificence and brilliance, against such a tonal background, the solo rôle in the premiere of this great American opera.
IMAGISM: PER SE.

"A protest that is also prophecy."

----Edwin Markham.

Unlike the poetry of England and early America, that of the new generation was produced for the most part by individuals rather than schools. But of the short-lived groups that appeared from time to time, there is one of sufficient distinction to warrant our attention.

In February 1914, the self-expatriated Ezra Pound brought out in London the first anthology of "Des Imagistes." The issue had five American contributors: H.D., Skipwith Cannell, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams and Pound; and five British: Aldington, Rueffer, F.S. Flint, James Joyce and Allen Upward.

"The anthology [says Mr. Kreymborg] was greeted with derision in high academic circles, and a battle of pens began between Americans abroad and Americans at home. The battle is still on, with, for the most part, a different and younger set of characters—still overshadowed by Pound, shifting his army base from London to Paris, Paris to Siena, Siena to Rapallo, and so on. Not long after "Des Imagistes" emerged, a quarrel of some sort broke out between Pound and Miss Lowell. The Brookline

empress, as vigorous a person as Pound, with a much more calculating genius, took over the reins of Imagism and supervised the publication of the next three anthologies. They came out in Boston in 1915, '16 and '17. An unsigned preface declared that 'differences of taste and judgment. . . have arisen among the contributors to 'Des Imagistes'; growing tendencies are forcing them along different paths.' A new title was decided on, "and we have been joined by two or three poets who did not contribute to the first volume, our wider scope making this possible."

Aldington, R. D., Flint and Miss Lowell remained; John Gould Fletcher and D. H. Lawrence were added. No mention was made of Pound or the other absentees, or why they were absent."

The Imagist group gradually dissolved, each going his own artistic or inartistic way. The credos of the movement reached highest fulfillment in the stark Greek simplicity of H. D.'s work.

The Imagists did not "represent an exclusive artistic sect; we publish our work together because of mutual artistic sympathy." They were "united by certain common principles, arrived at independently. These principles are not new; they have fallen into desuetude."

As a protest against the threadbare mannerisms of post-Victorian verse, with a background of Greek Melic, Hebrew, and Oriental poets, as well as Walt Whitman and the contemporary French Symbolists, there is set down in the preface to the anthology, "Some Imagist Poets," a brief list of tenets to which the poets contributing to it mutually agreed.

4 Explained by Amy Lowell they are as follows:

1. To use the language of common speech, but to
employ always the exact word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word.

2. To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon "free-verse" as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as for a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free-verse than in conventional forms. In poetry a new cadence means a new idea.

3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. It is not good art to write badly of aeroplanes and automobiles, nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old-fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911.

4. To present an image (hence the name: "Imagist"). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.

5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.

6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry.

"It is not primarily on account of their forms, as is commonly supposed, that the Imagist poets represent a changed point of view; it is because of their reactions toward the world in which they live."
"We see therefore that these canons boil down into something like the following succinct statements: Simplicity and directness of speech; subtlety and beauty of rhythms; individualistic freedom of idea; clearness and vividness of presentation; and concentration. Not new principles, by any means. . . . ."

"One characteristic of Imagist verse which was not mentioned in this preface [the anthology, "Some Imagist Poets,"], is: Suggestion—the implying of something rather than the stating of it, implying it perhaps under a metaphor, perhaps in an even less obvious way."

They were, in other words, doing what they could to reduce poetry to its irreducible elements, making it simple and direct and vivid, even though in so doing they might have to discard many of the riper and ampler charms to which poetry has traditionally laid claim.

The Imagists' gesture was the signal for the opening of the free-verse controversy which was to have such conspicuous if harmless effects during the next half-dozen years. It was also to make the way ready for experiments of a boldness of which the Imagists never dreamed.

5. Ibid., The Imagists, p. 246-7.
AMY LOWELL.

"Christ! What are patterns for?"

---- Amy Lowell.

This passionate protest penned by the scion of one of the most conservative families of a most tradition-fettered region was less a denunciation of Platonian principles than a plea for freedom from the hide-bound horizons of moral and spiritual Victorian-steeped New England. From behind the domineering mask of "a Roosevelt among Parnassians" came this wistful heart-cry of a hungry woman, lonely, sensitive, proud. So proud, in fact, that rarely was the mask allowed to slip from place exposing the massive face of that child-hearted idealistic woman to the eager eyes of a curious, critical public.

Physically unbeautiful and undoubtedly the object of more or less childish ridicule, Amy Lowell, early in life, learned to hide her true self behind a masculine defense, which she soon found out worked admirably. This gave her a sense of power which, coupled with the longing for more of the sweet taste of domineeringness, made her turn her defensive mechanism outward. With characteristic vigor she used this crust as a weapon of offense. This enforced distrust of mankind which withheld her from facing her readers as a woman of abiding charm of personality and spiritual magnetism, allowed her to be seen only as a poet of braggadocio, dictatorial belligerency and big black cigars.
The New Statesman described her:

"She was of immense physique, with a massive head, a brow that suggested a vast reservoir of brain force, a voice that told of arrogant and conquering vitality. . . . She was masculine, overwhelming. . . . A good round oath was as natural to her lips as the uncompromising cigar that gave flavor to her after-dinner talk and kept her going through nights of literary labor, for she habitually worked till dawn."

In his biography of the "Brookline ḡadamanthus", Clement Wood recounts her "immense egotism. . . a baffled egotism that determined to wring from an unwilling world such tribute as an empress might envy. When she reached New York City, she did not visit editors and publishers; she notified them to call upon her. On their arrival, she announced to them which poems they would be permitted to publish. There was no question of accepting or rejecting her work—she laid down the law. Her right was rooted only in her preemption of it. An infrequent editor refused to be so bull-dozed; whereupon she became graciously merely a writer, anxious for his editorial approval."

In 1910, after a rigorous apprenticeship to versification in eight years of hard study and travel, her first verse appeared in the Atlantic Monthly. It was followed two years later by her first book, "A Dome of Many- Coloured Glass"; conventional poems on conventional themes.

Shortly after this time her extensive travels brought

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7. ibid., Chap. II, p. 35-6.
her into contact with Pound and the Imagist group. "Ten years older than any member of the group, Miss Lowell had ten times their practical energy. After the differences with Pound—an event to which she dedicated a trivial poem—Miss Lowell took the affairs of Imagism in hand. She was master and mistress of every known method of advertising, propaganda, controversy and public speaking, and her brilliant wit cracked many a hostile skull. She intimidated virtually every one who approached the throne she sat on—no matter what or where the occasion. The tales about such encounters are legion. 'This is the Amy Lowell the earth cannot replace.'"

"Sword Blades and Poppy Seed," the first of her books after her usurpation of the Imagist throne, appeared in 1914 and was followed by "Six French Poets" in 1915. "Men, Women and Ghosts" came out the succeeding year, to an ever-increasing chorus of applause.

In the former volume five poems elicit casual mention: "Absence," "A Gift," "Anticipation," "Music," and the portrait of "A Lady." The first three, addressed to an absent lover, are gracefully lyric but not outstanding in quality. Of "A Gift," which describes the "words" a lover gives to his beloved, Mr. Kreymborg says "One would feel this more poignantly had the lover given more than words." "Anticipation," which recounts the desire of the lover for his beloved closes with a single effective image which likens the beloved's coming to the quenching of an excruciating thirst:

"I am parched now, and my tongue is horrible in my mouth, But my brain is noisy With the clash and gurgle of filling wine-cups."
"Music" and "A Lady" are charming pen portraits of two interesting individuals from the subjective viewpoint of the poet.

"A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass" and "Sword Blades and Poppy Seed" contain, in flaunting violation of the first Imagist credo:

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word.

an amazing vocabulary of "stock" poetical touches. In "Tendencies in Modern American Poetry," Miss Lowell notes that "the language of common speech means a diction which carefully excludes inversions, and the clichés of the old poetic jargon." Cliché she explains as a phrase in common use, not peculiar to the author, including old, faded expressions like "battlemented clouds" and "mountainous seas."

Among the clichés Mr. Wood notes in the first volume "are kissing breeze, savage ruth, 'twas a dream, freighted with hope, like to, wafts of rich perfume, scream for very joy, I am fain, opaline gates of the Castle of Dream, Nature's tender ministries, Thou yellow trumpeter of laggard spring (of a daffodil) . . . As to inversions, there are many more than a dozen in the volume, such as valleys deep, to ride I am fain and eggs a score on the same page, and so on. As to the obsolescent or obsolete vocabulary, we have athwart, dole, thee, employ (for employment), a-slumber, fraught, o'erhung, mart, 'tis, 'twas, standest, and so thuddingly on. The poem "Mirage," in two successive lines, refers to the same person as you and thee—an ungrammatical jumbling of

pronouns... "The verses at times sag into an unbelievable fragility, concetti typical only of the perdurably inferior among magazine versifiers:

"Oh! to be a flower
Nodding in the sun,
Bending, then upspringing
As the breezes run;
Holding up
A scent-brimmed cup
Full of summer's fragrance to the summer sun."

Or again,

"You came to me bearing bright roses,
Red like the wine of your heart;
You twisted them into a garland
To set me apart from the mart.
Red roses to crown me your lover,
And I walk aureoled and apart."

Or again,

"Life is a stream
On which we strew
Petal by petal the flower of our heart."

At times the titles, Dipsa, Hora Stellatrix, Teatro Bambino, Crepuscule du Matin, are foreign tags flaunting an erudition desired rather than attained. All in all, the volume was an inauspicious start..."

"An intimate examination of "Sword Blades and Poppy Seed" for clichés is not encouraging, as to the progress of Miss Lowell's art. But in this volume, it is at least true that, for all her ancient jargon, there is a bellicose vigor throughout that is far from musty, and is in direct contrast to the earlier book.

"Men, Women and Ghosts" is a finer volume. The clichés have all but vanished—a negative merit. The Opening poem, "Patterns," is by all odds her most popular product; and, with the possible exception of one or two other poems, her most poetic product. In it, she has mastered her medium almost completely:

"I walk down the garden paths,
And all the daffodils
Are blowing, and the bright blue aquills.
I walk down the patterned garden-paths
In my stiff brocaded gown.
With my powdered hair and jewelled fan,
I too am a rare
Pattern. As I wander down
The garden paths."

Here we must pause. The break introduced by "As" is not only ungrammatical, but it is unmusical, adds nothing to the picture, and is a definite let-down. The tenth and eighteenth lines in stanza two mark similar crudities; the last line of the third stanza is another instance. Consider this beauty:

"I would be a pink and silver as I ran along the paths,
And he would stumble after
Bewildered by my laughter."

This lovely phrase is followed by an unaiding dissonance:

"I should see the sun flashing from his sword-hilt
And the buckles on his shoes."
Once more in this stanza, twice in the one following, occurs the break in the music and the tension. The stanza next to the last is definitely weaker than the others; then comes a lovely stretch—

"In Summer and in winter I shall walk
up and down
The patterned garden-paths
in my stiff, brocaded gown.
The squills and daffodils
will give place to pillared roses, and to asters,
and to snow."

I must pause to express utter delight in the exquisite couplet just quoted. Here we have poetry, inevitable in music, haunting in its evocation of the slow surge of beauty toward its hour of sleep. In dreadful contrast, the two lines before the final couplet are as sodden as a mired path.

"The poem, in spite of its flaws, succeeds; it is a period picture out of the poet's heart, giving a full sense of the tragedy of love inconnate. The theme is poignant; and the emotion evoked overrules immediate 'intimate examination,' to use Miss Lowell's phrase. When, in the cool aftermath, the poem is studied, it must be confessed that its worth remains as a dramatic monolog; and that the attitude of the woman is emotional rather than intellectual. For love, and marriage, are as much patterns as war is. Of its kind, the poem is excellent. A slightly keener ear for word music would have elided the flaws, and made it infinitely surer of man's eternity."

"The Dinner-Party," a sardonic evaluation of an (undoubtedly) personal experience of the poet, is glittering, polished, charged with intense emotion, and ultra-sophistication:
Fish.

"So . . ." they said,
With their wine-glasses delicately poised,
Harking at the thing they cannot understand.
"So . . ." they said again,
Amused and insolent.
...

Coffee.

...

I saw them as a circle of ghosts
Sipping blackness out of beautiful china,
And mildly protesting against my coarseness
in being alive.

Talk.

They took dead men's souls
And pinned them on their breasts for ornament;
...

And I took a green liquer from a servant
So that he might come near me
And give me the comfort of a living thing.

Eleven O'clock.

The front door was hard and heavy,
it shut behind me on the house of ghosts.

... ... ... ... ...
I ran my hand along the railings

... ... ... ... ...
And pressed their pointed bars
into my palms.

... ... ... ... ...
When I woke in the night
I laughed to find them aching,
For only living flesh can suffer.

In her later books "Can Grande's Castle," "Pictures of the Floating World," "Legenda," "What's O'clock," "East Wind," "Ballads for Sale" (the last three issued posthumously), Miss Lowell introduced an eccentric experimental form which she termed "polyphonic prose." In the preface to "Can Grande's Castle" she writes: "Polyphonic prose" is perhaps a misleading title, as it tends to make the layman think that this is a prose form.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. The word 'prose' in its title simply refers to the manner in which the words are printed; 'polyphonic'—many voiced—giving the real key. 'Polyphonic prose' is the freeest, the most elastic, of all forms, for it follows at will any, and all, of the rules which guide other forms. Metrical verse has one set of laws, cadenced verse another; 'polyphonic prose' can go from one to the other in the same poem with no sense of incongruity. Its only touchstone is the taste and feeling of its author.
"Yet, like all other artistic forms, it has certain fundamental principles, and the chief of these is an insistence on the absolute adequacy of the manner of a passage to the thought it embodies. Taste is therefore its determining factor; taste and a rhythmic ear ...

"Putting aside one rhythm of English prosody after another, I finally decided to base my form upon the long, flowing cadence of oratorical prose. The variations permitted to this cadence enable the poet to change the more readily into those of verse libre, or even to take the regular beat of metre, should such a marked time seem advisable ...

"Others of the many voices of 'polyphonic prose' are rhyme, assonance, alliteration, and return ...

"Return in 'polyphonic prose' is usually achieved by the recurrence of a dominant thought or image, coming in irregularly and in varying words, but still giving the spherical effect which I have frequently spoken of as imperative in all poetry."

But Miss Lowell erred in one respect: basically "oratorical prose" is prose, and not poetry. As a result "polyphonic prose" is a literary hybrid. It is not good prose; it is too affected--neither is it poetry; it lacks poetic rhythm and its consequent emotion. Take the opening of "Sea-Blue and Blood-Red":

"Blue as the tip of the salvia blossom, the inverted cup of the sky arches over the sea. Up to meet it, in a flat band of glaring colour, rises the water. The sky is unspotted by clouds, but the sea is flecked with pink and white light shadows, and silver scintillations snap-snap over the tops of the waves."

It is noisily colorful; it glitters, it scintillates, it is
painfully dazzling. The noisy novelty of it attracts for a moment, but the constant unremitting brilliancy of it soon dulls the senses; it "slithers over the polished surface of the reader's mind, and recoils upon itself." The quintessence of incongruity is reached in such passages as the following:

"Such a pounding, pummelling, pitching, pointing, piercing, pushing, pelting, poking, panting, punching, parrying, pulling, prodding, poking, piling, passing, you never did see,"

One is tempted to make an inventory of the dictionary to ascertain if any verb beginning with the sixteenth letter of the alphabet has been omitted.

Miss Lowell's work dazzles with the enormous output, the incredible variety of themes, the technical facility. But on the whole, very few poems stir the heart beyond the moment of reading. A lover of color and sound responds to the countless images and rhythms. But they are mostly patterns, undulating lines tastefully arranged, perfect surfaces and movements. No one works more consciously or effectively than Miss Lowell but her poems lack the one essential element of all literature--life. The woman succeeded so well in hiding behind the poet that very little now remains except the mask, brilliant and gaudy though it is. Amy Lowell was a talented celebrity, but no genius.

From the vast output of Miss Lowell's work one selects a few creditable poems which, through merit and sheer beauty, bid fair for a place in the annals of that literature which will survive. One is aware that such a list would possibly vary, and rightly so, at the hands of each critic who should attempt such an arrangement. Time alone will separate the tinsel from the gold, the colored glass from the jewels, and the critic of
a century hence will undoubtedly be more nearly in a position to speak with authority.


Through "Thorn Piece," as also in "Primaire," in a beautiful colorful imagery, rings the wistful, frightened cry of the woman-heart, desperate at the thought of death's separation--

"For I fear the whirl of the cliff-wrung sea,
And the biting night. You smile at my fears,
But the years--years--
Like leaves falling."

"Prime" is a graceful short lyric from the lover to his beloved; "Meeting-House Hill" has a nostalgic yearning for China; "Mackerel Sky," another love poem, closes on the significant line:

"I am gayer in my colours than in my heart."

"Purple Crackles" and "Lilacs" are purely Yankee poems—decidedly superior to those in "East Wind"—and the only works of Miss Lowell that rank with Robert Frost. Mr. Kreymborg considers "Lilacs" the most personal of all Miss Lowell's poems. "Behind the heart-shaped leaves, one can hear the beat of a heart-shaped woman." The poem closes with a personal note vaguely Whitmanesque in tone:

"Heart-leaves of lilac all over New England,
Roots of lilac under all the soil of New England,
Lilac in me because I am New England,
Because my roots are in it,
Because my leaves are of it,
Because my flowers are for it,
Because it is my country
And I speak to it of itself
And sing of it with my own voice
Since certainly it is mine."

In "A Decade," the poet plays the part of a caustic
wife or husband:

"When you came, you were like red wine and honey,
And the taste of you burnt my mouth with its sweetness.
Now you are like morning bread,
Smooth and pleasant.
I hardly taste you at all, for I know your savour;
But I am completely nourished."

"We have much that, for Miss Lowell's sake, must be
forgotten, and will be; and we find one poem so hauntingly lovely
that we marvel that the same hand could write it and the 'poor
jerry-built things' that make up the Death Valley of the whole.
'Nuit Blanche' is as affecting as the more distinguished music
of Conrad Aiken; it is, to this ear at least, enduring poetry.
I want no horns to rouse me up tonight,
And trumpets make too clamorous a ring
To fit my mood, it is so weary white
I have no wish for doing any thing.

A music coaxed from humming strings would please;
Not plucked, but drawn in creeping cadences
Across a sunset wall where some Marquise
Picks a pale rose amid strange silences.
Ghostly and vaporous her gown sweeps by
The twilight dusking wall, I hear her feet
Delaying on the gravel, and a sigh,
Briefly permitted, touches the air like sleet.

And it is dusk, I hear her feet no more.
A red moon leers beyond the lily-tank.
A drunken moon ogling a sycamore,
Running long fingers down its shining flank.

A lurching moon, as nimble as a clown,
Cuddling the flowers and trees which burn like glass.
Red, kissing lips, I feel you on my gown--
Kiss me, red lips, and then pass--pass.

Music, you are pitiless to-night.
And I so old, so cold, so languorously white.

It is difficult to phrase the delight that the discovery of such a poem brings. The critic goes to a book, not seeking its flaws and failures, but its excellences; he is otherwise not fit to be a critic. If he finds the former, a sense of his responsibility to the craft of criticism lays on him the imperative to chronicle them, as charitably as is consonant with honesty, that others may avoid the quickmud. But his search is for the latter; if a contemporary poet has failed, a part of himself has failed likewise, since he must regard every contemporary as a part of his own voice the voice of the age he seeks to express. No poet—and our discerning critic must be that—desires to be measured beside dead Olympians and living pygmies; his best can best be evoked by a high worth around him. From the thin-aired plateau of the ages the low valley with one outstanding hill is little, compared to
a rugged range whose many peaks split the clouds. We have sought to find what is enduring and worthy in Miss Lowell. We find 'Patterns,' memorable, and not quite flawless; we find 'Nuit Blanche,' magical and haunting; we find a persisting experimentation, lacking subtlety of ear, knowledge, or intuition; we find flaws beyond anticipation. For the slim merits our delight rises; but the abiding impression is that Miss Lowell, in verse, was less poet than celebrity."

"As the fish that leaps from the river,
As the dropping of a November leaf at twilight,
As the faint flicker of lightning down the southern sky,
So I saw beauty, far away."

———John Gould Fletcher.

Least popular of all the Imagists, and undeservedly so, this restless hunter of "fugitive beauty" in his unending quest has forsaken his homeland for the exotic, strangely half-familiar atmosphere of the older, tradition-rich continent of his forefathers—but in body only. The roving nature, the gorgeous imagination, the lonely mystical spirit of this too uncandid poet hark back with unswerving instinct to the illimitable vistas and horizons of the younger continent, and most often to his native southland.

John Gould Fletcher was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, on January 3, 1886. His father was Scotch-Irish, and came of pioneer stock, the family having lived in Tennessee from pre-Revolutionary days until the early nineteenth century, when the poet's grandfather moved westward across the Mississippi River. John Gould Fletcher, Sr., enlisted in the Southern army at the beginning of the Civil War, and was made captain after the battle of Chickamauga, serving with distinction until he was wounded at the battle of Murfreesboro. He had little formal education, but possessed excellent business sense, and as cotton buyer and
owner of a general store in Little Rock was able to amass considerable wealth. In 1877 he married Adolphine Krause, a talented woman of Danish and German descent, her father having come from Denmark in 1839 and her mother from Hanover in 1835. In the tracing of racial traits, it is interesting to note a certain strain of sentiment in John Gould Fletcher's work, which he undoubtedly inherits from his German and Danish forbears. We can also see a love of the fantastic, a sort of allegorical, elfin quality which links him to these Northern, Teutonic nations.

When the future poet was four years old, he moved with his parents and two sisters into a large square white house of Colonial design. This house is the background of his childhood. The profound impression which it made upon the poet is shown in his "Ghosts of an Old House." Reading this series of short poems, one sees the house, one feels it, and one knows very well the imaginative child who lived in it.

Mr. Fletcher describes the house:

Prologue.
The house that I write of, faces the north:
No sun ever seeks
Its six white columns,
The nine great windows of its face.
It fronts foursquare the winds.

...  ...  ...

The windows rattle as if some one were in them wishing to get out
And ride upon the wind.
Doors lead to nowhere.
Squirrels burrow between the walls.
Closets in every room hang open,
Windows are stared into by uncivil ancient trees.

In the middle of the upper hallway
There is a great circular hole
Going up to the attic.
A wooden lid covers it.

All over the house there is a sense of futility;
Of minutes dragging slowly
And repeating
Some worn-out story of broken effort and desire.

Another object of momentousness to the sensitive, observing child is recalled in "The Front Door."
It was always the place where our farewells were taken,
When we travelled to the north.

I remember there was one who made some journey,
But did not come back.
Many years they waited for him;
At last the one who wished the most to see him
Was carried out of this self same door in death.

Since then all our family partings
Have been at another door.

Restless, even then, dissatisfied, tortured by a dominating, nameless desire for something beyond what even his fancy could
reach, we find the wistful little boy in the "Old Nursery."
In the tired face of the mirror
There is a blue curtain reflected.
If I could lift the reflection,
Peer a little beyond, I would see
A boy crying
Because his sister is ill in another room
And he has no one to play with:
A boy listlessly scattering building blocks,
And crying,
Because no one will build for him the palace of Fairy Morgam.
It is stiff and frozen.

In August, 1908, after preliminary travel in western United States, Mr. Fletcher turned his face eastward across the Atlantic. After a colorful winter in Italy he moved to London, which greatly intrigued his imagination. It is from this moment that his real career as a poet begins.

During the next few years he "sowed his literary wild oats, as he insists they are, in the shape of five little books of poems, which, with careless indifference of ridicule, were all published in the same year, 1913, and from the presses of four different firms. . . .

"It is possible to trace the influence of various poets in all these early volumes, as is natural in the work of a young man. The fault lay, not in writing them, but in publishing them. Mr. Fletcher is curiously unselective always. He is constantly progressing, and has scant sympathy for the phase just left
His first book to receive much attention was "Irradiations--Sand and Spray" (1915), for which Amy Lowell secured an American publisher. Intensely interested, as a layman, in music and painting, Mr. Fletcher realized that both forms of art were employing a new idiom; he felt that poetry too must break the old bonds. As a result he turned to vers libre and shortly afterwards became identified with the Imagist group.

Conrad Aiken in evaluating the volume says "In Irradiations" we find him taking his first ecstatic plunge into improvisation--formalism retards; and an amazingly rich treasure house of verbal reflexes, the gift of a temperament almost hyperaesthetic in its sensitiveness to colour, line, and texture--a temperament in which some profound disharmony is most easily struck at and shaken through these senses--is for the first time rifled. It is in this stage of a lyric poet's career that his speech most glistens. impressions come up shining from their long burial in the subconscious. The poet is perhaps a little breathless with his sudden wealth--he is at first content to bring up only small handfuls of the most glittering coin; he is even perhaps a little distrustful of it. But the habit of allowing himself to be possessed by this wealth grows rapidly. The mechanism becomes more familiar, if anything so vague as this kind of apperception can be said to be truly recognizable, and the poet

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learns the trick of shutting his eyes and not merely allowing, 
but precisely inviting, his subconscious to take possession of him. 
The trick consists largely in a knowledge, abruptly acquired, of 
his own character, and of such ideas as are, therefore, the "Open 
seal" to this cave. It was in colourism that Mr. Fletcher 
found this password."

Mr. Fletcher's earlier work illustrates the weaknesses 
intrinsic in a strict application of the imagist creed. His 
eleven color symphonies in "Goblins and Pagodas" (1916) are a 
practical demonstration of the inability of the mind to live by 
images alone. It is not enough to string images on a thread of 
color; the reader demands the added interest of emotion or thought 
or action.

13

Again Mr. Aiken passes judgment, perhaps too drastically;
"It is a sort of absolute poetry, a poetry of detached waver and 
brilliance, a beautiful flowering of language alone, a partheno-
genesis, as language were fertilized by itself rather than by 
thought or feeling. Remove the magic of phrase and sound, and 
there is nothing left: no thread of continuity, no relation 
between one page and the next, no thought, no story, no emotion. 
But the magic of phrase and sound is powerful, and it takes one 
into a fantastic world where one is etherealized, where one has 
deep emotions indeed, but emotions star-powdered, and blown to 
flame by speed and intensity rather than by thought or human 
warmth."

of the eleven color symphonies, the Blue, the Green and the White are apparently the best. The other colors are black and gold, golden, white and blue, orange, red, violet, gray, scarlet. These symphonies seem best to justify Mr. Aiken's criticism but Mr. Fletcher did not completely divorce himself from life, nor from sex either—as parthogenesis implies.

Blue Symphony.

V.

And now the lowest pine-branch
Is drawn across the disk of the sun.
Old friends who will forget me soon,
I must go on,
Toward those blue death-mountains.
I have forgot so long.

In the marsh grasses
There lies forever
My last treasure,
With hopes of my heart.

The ice is glazing over,
Torn lanterns flutter,
On the leaves is snow.
In the frosty evening
Tell the old bell for me
Once, in the sleepy temple.

Perhaps my soul will hear.

After glow:
Before the stars peep
I shall creep out into darkness.

Green Symphony.

III.

Far let the voices of the mad wild birds be calling me,
I will abide in this forest of pines.

When the wind blows
Battling through the forest,
I hear it distantly,
The crash of a perpetual sea.

When the rain falls,
I watch silver spears slanting downwards
From the pale river-pools of sky,
Enclosed in dark fronds.

When the sun shines,
I weave together distant branches till they enclose mighty circles,
I sway to the movement of hooded summits,
I swim leisurely in deep blue seas of air.

I hug the smooth bark of stately red pillars
And with cones carefully scattered
I mark the progression of dark dial-shadows
Flung diagonally downwards through the afternoon.

Far let the timid feet of dawn fly to catch me;
I will abide in this forest of pines;
For I have unveiled naked beauty,
And the things that she whispered to me in the darkness,
Are buried deep in my heart.
Now let the black tops of the pine-trees break like a spent wave,
Against the grey sky.
These are tombs and memorials and temples and altars
sun-kindled for me.

White Symphony.

II.

... ... ... ... ... ...
Autumn! Golden fountains,
And the winds neighing
Amid the monotonous hills;
Desolation of the old gods,
Rain that lifts and rain that moves away;
In the green-black torrent
Scarlet leaves.

... ... ... ... ... ...

III.

... ... ... ... ... ...

Over the sluggish snow,
Drifts now a pallid weak shower of bloom;
Boredom of fresh creation,
Death-weariness of old returns.

White, white blossom,
Fall of the shattered cups day on day;
Is there anything here that is not ancient,
That has not bloomed a thousand years ago?

Under the glare of the white-hot day,
Under the restless wind-rakes of the winter,
White blossom or white snow scattered,
And beneath them, dark, the graves.

Dark graves never changing,
White dream drifting, never changing above them;
O that the white scroll of heaven might be rolled up,
And the naked red lightning thrust at the smouldering earth!

These impassioned, rhapsodic utterances concerning the
cosmic vistas of the poet's mystical imagination find expression
always in the most skillful and intriguing rhythms: for Mr. Fleth-
cher, more than any of his contemporaries, is the absolute
master of that one element of verse libre. Basing his rhythm
upon the cadence—even his polyphonic prose poems show traces of
it—he secures an immense, half-hidden rhythmic foundation for
his intensely emotional, epic-like themes not unsimilar to that
of Whitman.

Not the least effective of his literary devices is the
unconscious, un-premeditated use of internal rhyme. In regular
metrical verse his rhymes are often far from happy. It is as if
the knowledge that he had to rhyme took away the faculty. Where
it is not imperative, it is often most cunningly accomplished.
But his sound effects are frequently got without the aid of
rhyme, for instance:

"A clash of cymbals—then the swift swaying footsteps
Of the wind."

In "Granite and Breakers" (1921) we find an ever-
increasing interest in humanity and a more mellowed, though none. the less passionate, reality. Turning to the macrocosmic America, Mr. Fletcher gives us vivid impressions of whole epochs, past and present, captures the immensity of the physical continent, and scans the horizon of the future with prophetic eyes. We are presented with sketches of New York and Chicago, New England, the Mississippi and the Old South, the Far West, and the America of tomorrow.

In evaluating the poems of this volume, Amy Lowell says "Perhaps the best one which he has done is this of the clipper-ship era. It illustrates his method of synthesizing a whole period in a single poem, instead of allowing it to be implied by one concrete example, as is the old and usual way. The particular ship which comes in from time to time is merely symbolic, and soon merges into the whole. Throughout the poem, Mr. Fletcher brings in snatches of well-known chanties sung by the sailors of all sailing ships the world over, but dating from the period in question. . . . " It is a splendid thing" . . . full of movement, so bright as to be almost dazzling, rough, lively, vigorous. The true epic of the fast-vanishing sailing ship."

His Mississippi poems are a "supreme revelation of the river"—steady, glimmering, silent, one feels the river pulsing, surging through line after line of these poems as

"Born of the forest and the cloud,  
It moves through a mile on mile of fertile valley;  
In deathless never-tiring strength it shapes  
All life within its bed, from birth till death."
In his Arizona poems we have the whole spirit of Colonial Spain:

Mexican Quarter.

By an alley lined with tumble-down shacks
And street-lamps askew, half-sputtering,
Feebly glimmering on gutters choked with filth and dogs
Scratching their mangy backs;
Half-naked children are running about,
Women puff cigarettes in black doorways,
Crickets are crying.
Men slouch sullenly
Into the shadows:
Behind a hedge of cactus,
The smell of a dead horse
Mingles with the smell of tamales frying.

And a girl in a black lace shawl
Sits in a rickety chair by the square of an unglazed window,
And sees the explosion of the stars
Softly posed on a velvet sky.
And she is humming to herself:—
"Stars, if I could reach you,
(You are so very clear that it seems as if I could reach you)
I would give you all to Madonna's image,
On the grey-plastered altar behind the paper flowers,
So that Juan would come back to me,
And we could live again those lazy burning hours
Forgetting the tap of my fan and my sharp words.
And I would only keep four of you,
Those two blue-white ones overhead,
to hang in my ears;  
And those two orange ones yonder,  
To fasten on my shoe buckles."

A little further along the street  
A man sits stringing a brown guitar.  
The smoke of his cigarette curls round his head,  
And he, too, is humming, but other words:  
"Think not that at your window I wait;  
New love is better, the old is turned to hate.  
Fate! Fate! All things pass away;  
Life is forever, youth is for a day.  
Love again if you may  
Before the stars are blown out of the sky  
And the crickets die;  
Babylon and Samarkand  
Are mud walls in a waste of sand."

Amy Lowell comments that she has "heard it objected in connection with this poem that tamales are never fried. And, as a matter of fact, that is, of course, so. Mr. Fletcher is often inexcusably careless about such details. But in spite of this unimportant trifle, is not the soul of Spain in that poem, the Spain of a debased and deserted colony?"

The "Grand Canyon" describes clouds in a lazy procession  
"Over black-dappled walls:

Where rise sharp-fretted, golden-roofed cathedrals  
Exultantly, and split the sky with light."
and in the "Cliff-Dwelling" the spirit and atmosphere of the desert is embodied in
"... the sound of water tinkling,
A clock that ticks the centuries off to silence."
In "The Song of the Wind," a polyphonic prose poem, one recalls certain of Miss Lowell's indiscreet devices in such passages as
"The wind that comes up humming, buzzing, singing, tingling, ringing through the treeless plains. . . ."
and
"... then comes on in multitudes, flickering, licking dry wavelets, screaming, fighting, tingling, tossing, clanging, prowling, growling, howling, rasping, soaring, crashing and ebbing away."

In "Japanese Prints," Mr. Fletcher, as have several of his contemporaries, turned from the more conventional themes near at hand to the remote and strange romance of a foreign literature—that of Japan. "This whole tendency [says Conrad Aiken] is indicative of a curious truckling to reason: one desires to talk of beauty and wonder as if they shone at one's very door, but the joyous confidence of youth, the only magician who could make that immanence a reality, has, alas, vanished. Consequently one admits that such things are not to be found at one's humble and matter-of-fact door, and takes refuge in the impalpability and marvel of distance. In 'Japanese Prints' Mr. Fletcher has made this excursion neither brilliantly nor badly. These poems are slight, pleasant, sometimes sharply etched, in a few cases magical . . . ."

These poems have about them a redolence and charm reminiscent of Japan but they lack the certain philosophical
naivenes peculiar to all Japanese poetry. Realizing this Mr. Fletcher wrote concerning them: "...they are not Japanese at all, but all illustrate something of the charm I have found in Japanese poetry and art." Japanese poetry consists less in a form to follow, than a spirit—and the spirit has eluded, in all except a few instances, the imitative pen of Mr. Fletcher. His poems are truly "Japanese prints," minature etchings of Japanese life, to be seen as such, not diminutive carved specimens of Japanese culture and civilization as are the real Japanese poems.

Perhaps the finest of Mr. Fletcher's art is voiced in the noble tribute to Lincoln, in which the beloved Rail-splitter is likened to "a gaunt, scraggily pine."

Ungainly, labouring, huge,

The wind of the north has twisted and gnarled its branches;
Yet in the heat of mid-summer days, when thunder clouds ring the horizon,

A nation of men shall rest beneath its shade.

The clamour of cannon dies down, the furnace-mouth of the battle is silent,

The midwinter sun dips and descends, the earth takes on afresh its bright colours.

But he whom we mocked and obeyed not, he whom we scorned and mistrusted,

He has descended, like a god, to his rest.

Over the uproar of cities,

Over the million intricate threads of life weaving and crossing,
In the midst of problems we know not, tangling, perplexing, ensnaring,
Rises one white tomb alone.

Strew over him flowers:
Blue forget-me-nots from the north and the bright pink arbutus
From the east, and from the west rich orange blossom,
But from the heart of the land take the passion-flower;
Rayed, violet, dim,
With the nails that pierced, the cross that he bore and the circlet,
And beside it there lay also one lonely snow-white magnolia,
Bitter for remembrance of the healing which has passed.

We may leave this poem, says Amy Lowell, "as the evidence of the deepening and broadening of his art. It is an earnest of the future, and, crushing as the war seems now, hard and bitter the weight it imposes upon the brains and hearts of men, it is in such poems as these that we feel the renewing power of art, rising even upon the wings of despair. Mr. Fletcher has needed just this violent concussion between imagination and fact. Without it, he would always have been an extraordinarily original and suggestive poet; with it, he may well become a great one. Mr. Fletcher is a virtuoso of words, and sometimes this faculty runs away with him. Some of his symphonies, some of the poems in 'Irradiations,' are heaped too full of words, the changes he rings are too heavy, he confuses too many colours, too many sounds. His enormous fecundity is responsible for this. It is hard for him to curb his exuberance. Nature has given him much,
and it is difficult for him to put himself to school. His books would gain by being pruned; but, as I said in the beginning, he lacks the selective instinct. It is largely for this reason that he is not yet esteemed as he should be. But, for the discerning eye, no living poet has more distinction of vision or of style. In him, indeed, we see the beginning of that new order of which I have so often spoken. To the poet, he is a real teacher, indicating new directions, opening up untrodden ways of thought."
"And remember, while rich music yawns and closes,  
With a luxury of pain, how silence comes."

----Conrad Aiken.

Three years after the birth of John Gould Fletcher, the South saw the advent of another who was to be his contemporary in the literary field: Conrad Potter Aiken, critic, short story writer, novelist, and poet, was born on August 5, 1889, at Savannah, Georgia. Sheer lyricist, a poet's poet, dispassionately introspective and highly intellectual, he is probably the most distinguished Southern poet since Edgar Allen Poe. And like his spiritual forefather, he has attempted, more successfully than any other poet of our time, to create in words the effects of music. To this end, it was necessary to minimize the sound-values, to attempt the flowing repetitious developments of symphonic writing.

"Tragedy [says Mr. Kreymborg] visited the Savannah poet early in life, and tragedy has haunted his subsequent movements from place to place, across the seas and back again. With him, as with Poe, nightmare is the one reality, and to the study of the unconscious at work in the dark, he brings a high order of psychology. Poe treated his manias with a technical equipment remarkable for its cold, clear insight into the throes of the psyche, and a musical statement, whether in verse or prose, of its battle for self-preservation. A scholar of the broadest, if not of the deepest calibre, Aiken does the same, aided by the latest discov-
eries of continental psychology. He is the psychoanalyst par excellence among American poets, and enough of an artist not to draw trite morals in the course of a narrative." 14

Mr. Aiken's work is often monotonous for lack of variety; to the accompaniment of a tired but often beautiful music, characterized by new rhythms and haunting cadences, rain falls persistently, shadows blur, petals drift in the wind; reality is always seen through a misty veil, love dies at fulfillment, and even sorrow loses its poignance in a dream of forgetfulness, seeming ever on the point of falling asleep. The only reality is unreality and the only living thing is death—most often the death of love. A dreamy langor pervades all, misty, blurred, lethargic. Mr. Untermeyer comments that Mr. Aiken often loses himself in the "watery welter of language. In trying to create a closer liaison between poetry and music, he gives, too frequently, so much importance to the rise and fall of syllables that his very excess of music defeats his purpose. His verse, thus, gains greatly on the sensuous side but loses, in its cloying indefiniteness, that vitality and sharpness of speech which is the very blood of poetry." 15

His first volume, EARTH TRIUMPHANT AND OTHER TALES IN VERSE (1914), shows strong influence of Keats and Masefield. TURNS AND MOVIES (1916) is a complete change; Masefield is ex-

changed for Masters. In his later books, THE JIG OF FORSLIN (1916), NOCTURNE OF REMEMBERED SPRING (1917), THE CHARNEL ROSE (1918), and THE HOUSE OF DUST (1920), he discards much of this hampering influence and sings his own solitary song. The melancholy monotony of theme, the mild disillusionment frequently emerges in exquisite lyric passages. Mr. Aiken has written many narrative poems, but he is essentially a lyric poet and is found at the height of his genius in the shorter poems of that element.

His "versification is skillful, [says Mr. Kreymborg] so skillful that we are lulled by its mellifluous perfection, lull-ed altogether. No man has a finer technical equipment; the ease with which Aiken writes is astounding; most of his pages achieve finality in the first draft; and this facility enables him to write poem after perfect poem, essay and story after essay and story. Since 1914, he has published nearly fifteen volumes of poetry and prose. All of the books are well written, too well written."

Persistent despair over-shadows the poet, pervades his spirit; he cannot divorce himself from it. "There is never more than a mention of laughter in Aiken," comments Mr. Kreymborg. "Nobody laughs in his poetry, the author least of all. Even a smile is grim or distorted, and the occasional humor wistful or skeptical. Sex runs through nearly every line, and the body and disillusion prevail. The mind can reach no conclusion, no serenity except in further defeat. Woman is a Medusa, a snake, a vampire, and man 'immortally baffled.'"

Although Mr. Aiken is not so original as Poe, there is a stronger current of reality under his music; it is not so ethereal, spiritual, elysian. We see reality--truly an obsessed, erotic
reality—through a mist of despair, disillusion, and repressed emotional agony, but we nonetheless feel that we are viewing actual reality much as we view the earth, clad in a blue distance, through a veil of April rain. But the poet does not cry out in his agony; he is esthete enough to keep the intellect superior to his emotion. We see the man distinctly always; the woman never, but only as a part of the blur of unreality. But the man does not find it in his heart to blame the woman for the death of love; there is only regret—hopeless, tired regret—and the half-realized futility of the defiance of a fate, eternal and universal, that is ruthless, whimsical, ironical.

After disillusionment the bewildered lovers meet, face to face, and remember

"... a certain day,
Or evening rather,—spring evening long ago,—
We talked of death, and love, and time, and truth ...
And said such wise things, things that amused us so ...? How foolish we were, who thought ourselves so wise!—
And then we laugh, with shadows in our eyes."

In his meditations the poet is taunted by chimeric visions: he sees

"A face somehow familiar, somehow strange,
Glimpsed in a crowd; who does not know
If it were seen before, or only dreamed,
Or who it is ... ."

He gropes blindly for something firm enough to base his life, his very existence, upon and comes only to the small comfort of the conclusion that

"This may be real, or a grotesque in my brain."
A grain of sand
May seem a desert, stared at long enough:
Eyes too intent, see blots and parallels.
Tremendous heavens peal in a scale of laughter.
A sidelong smile divulges smoking hells."

In the "White Nocturne" a bitter resignation, hopeless
and sardonical, to the tyrannical fate is attained, but not without effort:

"Yes, we have changed, slowly and silently changed;
We are the hungry ghosts of the selves we knew;
We sit on each other's tombs and stare at death,
We scarcely believe it true,--
And only then with a pang that is almost a cry,--
That once, long ago, we were the 'I' and the 'you'
Who stood bewildered under an April sky.
White night of snow, and a thousand nights like this;
Snow on our lips like the ghost of a kiss;
And a thousand nights in a hollow second of time
We will return again,
Silently, or with trivial speech, to climb
From lamp to lamp up the white street of pain.
Yet, is it better, (you say,
Painfully turning your darkened eyes away,)
To lend our souls to a quieter music at last;--
Remembering, when we will,
The sudden and gorgeous clashings of the past?...-
Snow falls about us, the hills mortally white
Wait far off in the undisturbing night."

"The Charnel Rose" contains Mr. Aiken's most popular
narrative, "Sanlin: A Biography"--really an autobiography.
Concerning the "Morning Song of Senlin," Margaret Wilkinson says it is "a lyric that sets the immensity and grandeur of nature side by side with our little deeds of every day, in sharp contrast. It is very spontaneous and original. The dew of surprise is still fresh on it. Everybody who is sensitive to contrasts between great things and small, who is capable of wonder in the thought of rising in the morning to a new day in an ancient and everlasting universe, and of setting beside the glory of that new day the least and most trivial of occupations, has felt what is said in this poem. But nobody else has put just this thing into poetry of this kind. "The Morning Song of Senlin" is a poem for imaginative people. Practical people may stumble over this juxtaposition of great things and small in it. They are accustomed to having poets tell them that grandeur and immensity are near at hand. But they are not accustomed to having the idea put into poetry in the words of a man who is only standing before a mirror and tying his necktie. They prefer to think that the person who speaks of grandeur is perched upon a remote and chilly hill-top with nothing to occupy him but contemplation, or that he paces some romantic stage with his eyes rolling in fine frenzy as he talks. They are tempted to forget that, for nearly everybody, the perception of beauty would be impossible if it had to be made into a vocation." 16

The following lines are especially charming in the subtle and delicate combination of the qualities of speech and song:

"The earth revolves with me, yet makes no motion,
The stars pale silently in the coral sky.
In a whistling void I stand before my mirror,
Unconcerned, and tie my tie."
There are horses neighing on far-off hills,
Tossing their long white manes,
And the mountains fa\(\text{\`a}\)sh in the rose-white dusk,
Their shoulders black with rains . . .

It is morning. I stand by the mirror
And surprise my soul once more;
The blue air rushes above my ceiling,
There are suns beneath my floor . . .

"Priapus And The Pool," Mr. Aiken's loveliest book,
contains beside the title poems, a number of beautiful lyrics
and narratives sung in the poet's own voice: "King Borborigm,"
"And in the Hanging Gardens," "The Wedding," "Cliff Meeting,"
"Exile," "Tetelestai."

Behind the mask of King Borborigm who laughs but

---Sleeps like Hamlet,

King of infinite space in a walnut shell---

But has bad dreams; I fear he has bad dreams."

we feel, rather than see, the harassed face of the fate-dominated poet. "And in the Hanging Gardens" is perhaps the most musical
of all the poems in this volume. The words, liquidly lyric,
ripple and merge in cadences of sound as silver waves in the
moonlight blend and break, one upon another.

"And in the hanging gardens there is rain
From midnight until one, striking the leaves
And bells of flowers, and stroking boles of planes,
And drawing slow arpeggios over pools,

Poetry, p. 326.
And stretching strings of sound from eaves to ferns.

And at one o'clock
The vulcan under the garden wakes and beats
The gong upon his anvil. Then the rain
Ceases, but gently ceases, dripping still,
And sound of falling water fills the dark
As leaves grow bold and upright, and as eaves
Part with water.

And at three o'clock
The moon inflames the lilac heads, and thrice
The vulcan, in his root-bound smithy, clangs
His anvil; and the sounds creep softly up
Among the vines and walls. The moon is round,
Round as a shield above the turret top.
The princess blows her candle out, and weeps
In the pale room, where scent of lilac comes,
Weeping, with hands across her eyelids, thinking
Of withered grass, withered by sandy wind.
The knave of diamonds, in his darkened room,
Holds in his hands a key, and softly steps
Along the corridor, and slides the key
Into the door that guards her. Meanwhile, slowly,
The king, with raindrops on his beard and hands,
And dripping sleeves, climbs up the turret stairs,
Holding the goblet upright in one hand;
And pauses on the midmost step, to taste
One drop of wine, wherewith wild rain has mixed."

"The Wedding" is an ironical but nevertheless humorous
account of the marital experience of Tithonus and Arachne—behind the lines one hears a faint echo of cynical laughter. In the "Cliff Meeting" the poet becomes infatuated with a very ordinary woman, hates himself for doing so after the illusion is gone, and returning, in spite of himself, on the morrow, finds at the place of rendezvous, a dying blue cormorant and a letter. He waits, thinking she must surely come and

The darkness gathered.
The sea-pinks lost their colour. And I walked
Along the cliff's-edge, losing all power of thought,
Taking the cormorant into the dark with me."

"Tetelestai" is a gorgeous elegy over the poet's own dead body.

"This, then, is the one who implores, as he dwindles to silence,
A fanfare of glory. . . . And which of us dares to deny him?"

Of "Priapus and the Pool" Mr. Kreymborg says "This volume contains fewer poetic clichés than the former volumes, fewer echoes of other poets. Though Aiken has been over this theme before and will go over it again, familiarity has mellowed the problem. The musician's hands are subtler, deeper, more poignant. Surfaces are as smooth as formerly, but they come out of modulations perfectly cadenced. The book is embryonic of the poet's entire quest as an amorist, a psychologist, an artist. Instead of another narrative, he gives us a volume of varied lyrics, each a facet of the internal dramatic scheme."

The title poem announces the main theme:

"Are we never to be left by our desires,
But forever try to warm our foolish hearts
At these illusory fires?"
Then follows a lyric of sheer adoration, and a third which likens the lover to a "ridiculous sparrow" in the world's "futile red net of desire." The fourth lyric, one of pure tenderness, is a portrait of the girl:

"... This is the shape of the tree,
And the flower, and the leaf, and the three pale beautiful pilgrims;
This is what you are to me."

But melancholy soon comes and pain--

"But I shall hide my torment like a fever
Within my breast, rejoicing when it feeds
Upon my heart; then only being certain
I live, when most my weak heart burns and bleeds."

A "desert of silence" follows; the growing adoration must remain unexpressed. Then the girl reveals her love and the poet cannot trust his senses, he is certain that only a ghost has spoken.

But evil appears; the beautiful girl is discovered to be only a Medusa. The lover's adoration turns to abhorrence. Finally in his bitterness and loneliness he finds the strength to drive her memory from his garden and his heart. Her place is filled by one "more holy who is born of dream."

"At last, at last all flesh-forgetful,
I pass, to make a dream my bride.
Come not! Lest when I find you,
Weeping I bind you,
Bandage your eyes, not lest they see
But lest they injure me;
Chain the strong hands and feet that were my joy
Not that I hate them but lest they destroy;
And dumbly watch you die, to praise that beauty
To which henceforth, I swear it by my love, I owe all duty."
"H. D."

... you

Shall long through the night but for this:
The roll of the full tide to cover you
Without question,
Without kiss."

-----H. D.

Of all the component poets of the now disbanded imagist school, only one has remained true to the tenets of the group and has brought their credos to a full and mature development. Hilda Doolittle "is indeed the perfect imagist; and one is tempted to call her the most perfect or nearly perfect of all American poets. Not alone has she mastered the single string she plays so poignantly and hauntingly, but with each performance, the vibrations grow richer, more moving. In her steady development, she still adheres to "the exact word," to poetry "that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite." Hard and clear though her poems are, they are also profoundly musical. Cadences echo the meaning as faithfully as in the fragmentary relics of her great idol, Sappho. More than any other descendant of the immortal Lesbian, this American deserves the proverbial laurel. But Hilda Doolittle is no mere follower or imitator. The life and music of her poems...

are inevitably her own. 17

Born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania on September 10, 1886, H. D. belongs spiritually to the Greece of more than twenty centuries ago, to the Athens, Sparta, and Thebes of fame and tradition. After graduating from Bryn Mawr, she went abroad in the summer of 1911 and, except for one visit to America, has never returned. Satiating her natural hunger for beauty in Italy and France, she turned to London for the stimulus of literary companionship. Here, after meeting with Ezra Pound, whom she had known years before in Philadelphia, she soon became a member of that small band of young insurgent poets of which he was one.

Her first poems were printed in the January, 1913, number of POETRY, over the pseudonym "H.D." followed by the word "Imagist." Soon she became identified with Richard Aldington, the well-known English Imagist, who also was fascinated by Greek culture and on October 18, 1913, they were married.

During the winter of 1915 and 1916, Mr. and Mrs. Aldington, in collaboration with a few other poets, published a number of translations of Greek and Latin poets. When her husband entered the army some months later, H.D. took over his editorial duties on THE EGOIST, a London magazine. In 1920 she visited America, settling for a few months in California. Upon returning to Europe in 1921, she went to live in Switzerland, on the shore of Lake Geneva. Her first book, "Sea Garden" appeared in London in 1916 and was followed by "Hymen" (1921), "Heliodora and Other Poems" (1924), and "Collected Poems" (1925).

Behind images of ancient Greek life seemingly as cold and finely cut, with the same sparse simplicity of line, as the
old Greek statues, H.D. hides the emotions, ecstasies, and passions of a vivid, blood-red, modern woman. Closely akin in spirit to Emily Dickinson, "H.D.'s language is more restrained on the surface," but "it is fully as impassioned as Emily's and the core closer to the body and nudity. It will usually take many readings to unearth the meaning of H.D.'s poetry. It is better to let the poetry seize oneself; one cannot go after it. ... Behind their Greek symbolism, the perpetual references to Greek gods, men and women, fables and legends, a wonderful heart beats away, an independent spirit, a lover, a woman. Inside the cold, hard forms, the song is extraordinary, fiery, tempestuous, proud, overwhelming. ... These poems were set down for one or two eyes and ears remote from all else: from time and space, and especially from the vulgar. These songs are unpopular and can never be popular. ... The varied forms are so finished, so statuesque, as to give the appearance of perfect figurines, cold to the touch--till one touches them. Then one is slowly heated and thrilled; one's veins and arteries beat higher and higher; one is flooded with love and runs mad with it, as this woman runs mad with it." Like the naive, shy, impulsive Emily, as indeed with all true artists, H.D.'s life is one of internal mental and emotional experiences, not of external events.

In images, brilliant, highly colored and polished, that imply but never render emotion, H.D. presents her intensely subjective themes in a coldly impersonal objective form. Through a subtle combination of rhythms and unrhymed lines she obtains perfectly cadenced expression for her classic imagery--pure imagery

that is fresh, living, modern, and hard. It never softens or becomes effeminate; even the "sea rose" is "harsh"
"marred and with stint of petals
meagre flower, thin,
sparse of leaf."
And though apparently stationary on the surface, this imagery has motion—motion of great rhythms, the sea, the wind, human figures that stride "along like something out of Homer."
"But now, our boat climbs—hesitates—
drops—
climbs—hesitates—crawls back—
climbs—hesitates—
we be swift—
we have always known you wanted us."
Intensely sensory are her images too, burning, vivid, highly-wrought, but always clear:
"You are not forgot,
no plunder of lilies,
honey is not more sweet
than the salt stretch of your beach."
And, again, the concentrated glare of the "Mid-Day":
"The light beats upon me.
I am startled—
a split leaf crackles on the paved floor—
I am anguished--defeated."
For sheer artistry and daring in the use of nuances in tone color we have the exquisite, fragily cool mass of violets, extravagant, profuse, and offering brought to the gods:

Sea Gods.
But we bring violets,
great masses—single, sweet,
wood-violets, stream-violets,
violets from a wet marsh.

Violets in clumps from hills,
tufts with earth at the roots,
violets tugged from rocks,
blue violets, moss, cliff, river-violets.

Yellow violets; gold,
burnt with a rare tint—
violets like red ash
among tufts of grass.
We bring deep-purple bird-foot violets.

We bring the hyacinth-violet,
sweet, bare, chill to the touch—
and violets whiter than the in-rush
of your own white surf.

In a "Sheltered garden" we find the poet over-whelmed
with perfection, gasping for breath, longing "for some sharp swish
of a branch", a "scent of resin", "aromatic, astringent--"; she
knows that

"... this beauty,
beauty without strength,
chokes out life."

and passionately tries, mentally,

"... to blot out this garden
to forget, to find a new beauty
in some terrible
wind-tortured place."

And in another "Garden" the poet is choked, smothered, oppressed:
"O wind, rend open the heat,
cut apart the heat,
rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop
through this thick air--
fruit cannot fall into heat
that presses up and blunts
the points of pears
and rounds the grapes.

Cut the heat--
plough through it,
turning it on either side
of your path."

In "Orchard," the cry is "Spare us from loveliness." The reason
for this tragic call comes out of "Night"--

"O night,
you take the petals
of the roses in your hand,
but leave the stark core
of the rose
to perish on the branch."

In "Eurydice" the woman reproaches the mutable lover:

"if you had let me wait
I had grown from listlessness
into peace,
if you had let me rest with the dead,
I had forgot you
and the past.

... ... ...

why did you turn?
why did you glance back?
why did you hesitate for that moment?
why did you bend your face
caught with the flame of the upper earth,
above my face?"

but in her heart she knows that

"my hell is no worse than yours
though you pass among the flowers and speak
with the spirits above the earth.

... ... ...

At least I have the flowers of myself;
and my thoughts, no god
can take that;
I have the fervour of myself for a presence
and my own spirit for light;

and my spirit with its loss
knows this;
though small against the black,
small against the formless rocks,
hell must break before I am lost;

before I am lost,
hell must open like a red rose
for the dead to pass."
In "The Tribute" to youth she has acknowledged an age-old debt:

"Could beauty be caught and hurt they had done her to death with their sneers in ages and ages past, could beauty be sacrificed for a thrust of a sword, for a piece of thin money tossed up to fall half alloy—then beauty were dead—long, long before we saw her face.

Could beauty be beaten out—
o youth the cities have sent to strike at each other's strength, it is you who have kept her alight."

"Hymen" is the quiet, dignified, Grecian rendering of the marriage ceremony of one who, though "she is high and far and blind in her high pride," is found to be "most kind" by those who sorrow, those who do not know

"how violets throw strange fire, red and purple and gold, how they glow gold and purple and red where her feet tread."

This poem characterizes a slight tendency toward conservatism by the introduction of an occasional rhyme, always appropriate and delicately handled.

In "Circe" the enchantress longs for Ulysses, the unattainable, the more fascinating and intriguing because of this fact
"It was easy enough to bend them to my wish, it was easy enough to alter them with a touch, but you adrift on the great sea, how shall I call you back?"

The woman-heart dominates the sorceress and in her anguish she "... would give up rock-fringes of coral and the inmost chamber of my island palace and my own gifts and the whole region of my power and magic for your glance."

In "The Islands", a fascinating poem with a gorgeous array of Greek names, she asks

"What are the islands to me if you hesitate, what is Greece if you draw back from the terror and cold splendour of song and its bleak sacrifice?"

Several fragments from Sappho, "Neither honey nor bee for me," "I know not what to do; my mind is divided," "Love... bitter-sweet," and others are exquisitely wrought and developed into poems of magic and charm, as is the picture of the pathetic
"Helen" she of "the still eyes in the white face, the lustre as of olives . . . and the white hands," whom "all Greece hates" and "could love indeed the maid, only if she were laid, white ash amid funereal cypresses."

Austere, tragic, fearless, with no self-pity H.D. heroically faces realities with no illusions. She suffers from a too minute and impressing observation, a too fertile imagination; she is tortured by beauty, piercing, exquisite, but she does not shrink from it. Her art is balanced, reposed, clear, sharp, unsentimentally strong, incisive, and astringent, but the whole is subtly mellowed over and deepened with an original charm.

"H.D.'s work deals entirely with those things which are constant and eternal. She seems quite unaffected by the world about her. Cliffs, and sea, and flowers, have always been the same . . . There are people who find this poetry cold. In one sense it is, for in it is something of the coolness of marble, something of the clarity of fresh water. But it is a mistake to suppose that this coolness, this clearness, covers no feeling. The feeling is there, but the expression chastens it. Let me mix my similes, let me liken H.D.'s poetry to the cool flesh of a woman bathing in a fountain--cool to the sight, cool to the touch, but within is a warm, beating heart . . .

"To appreciate this poetry one needs a certain knowledge. H.D. is indubitably a poet for poets. It is doubtful if the great mass of poetry lovers will ever fully appreciate work of such a delicate perfection, but it is no less important for that. . . .

"The faults of such poetry are not in its treatment, but in its very texture. This is a narrow art, it has no scope, it
neither digs deeply nor spreads widely. Not that it is superficial; it is quite the reverse. But merely that 'there are more things in Heaven and Earth' than such poetry takes cognizance of. H.D. is not a great poet, but she is a rarely perfect poet. It is true that she employs the same technique throughout her work, and that is perhaps monotonous to those who are not concerned with its excellence. It also bears with it the seeds of over-care, of something bordering on precisiness. There is a certain thinness in the original conception, and only the lustre of its polish saves it. But this is a lustre known to no one else. The secret is H.D.'s peculiar possession. Her poems are native, personal, to a marked degree. They show no slightest trace of those influences which until recently ruled American art. Deeply affected by classic literature, still it is only as a blush of colour that we perceive it in her work. The tricks of her manner occasionally recall the Greek, but her thoughts are perfectly her own. Here is a fresh flower, sprung out of a new graft upon an old stock. Here is the frank, unartificial paganism of a new world. Neither in point of view, nor in technique, does this art resemble any preceding English art, yet it is cosmopolitan in that it is a fusion of much knowledge, all melted and absorbed in the blood of a young and growing race. She takes her good where she finds it, and the perfect singleness of her aim has resulted in releasing all her forces to concentrate them upon the simple fact of beauty. There is no clipping her pattern to a traditional mode; there is no staining it for ulterior ends. It is completely personal, completely sincere. Meticulous, at times, undoubtedly, H.D.'s faults are obvious enough, because they are also her greatest virtues; but in the narrow com-
pass in which she works, she has achieved a rare and finely-wrought beauty." 19

"'Tis the white stag, Fame, we're a-hunting,
Bid the world's hounds come to horn."

--- Ezra Pound.

The radicals, Ezra Pound, Alfred Kreymborg and Maxwell Bodenheim, form a group not by reason of their allegiance to a defined creed like the Imagists, but by reason of their independent and radical experiments with either poetic material or method or both. The relation between them is emotional, but not logical.

To Ezra Pound, who long ago forsook his native land for the stable charm of England, belongs the credit for organizing the first imagist group, which passed soon after into the capable hands of Amy Lowell. A pioneer in new poetic forms, it is largely through his energetic efforts in defense of the "new poetry" that a great deal of interest has been aroused concerning it, in both Europe and America. He fought dullness wherever he encountered it and "helped to make many of the paths which a score of unconsciously influenced poets tread with such ease and nonchalance."

Mr. Pound's poetry is ever brilliant, even over-intellectual, witty, skillful, satiric, and highly-colored with innumerable odds and ends of classic and mediaeval learning and tradition. An adroit, intensely-creative imagination, and a deliberate mystification of a Browningesque flavor portray a "strangely alluring but irritating personality." Often discordant, his music is many times strained and weakened by a deliberate striving after effect.
His later works especially mark him at times as a living anachronism, drawing life not from life itself but from books, due to his passionate devotion to strange old cultures. His creative period has gradually closed since the war as he has turned more and more to translation and pedantry.

Pound published his first volume of poetry, "A Lume Spento," while living in Venice in 1908. Upon going to London, he brought out there in 1909 a second volume, "Personae," which included most of the poems in his former book. Since then he has written a number of volumes of poetry, "Ripostes" (1912), "Cathay" (1915), "Lustra" (1917), and others which were published in a volume of collected poems in 1926. The collected poems, like the earliest English edition, are called "Personae."

The first number of this collection, "The Tree," a poem in perfect cadences, sings of "many a new thing understood that was rank folly to my head before." Folly is a pet epithet throughout Pound's career. This folly will save us from many a solemn poet before and after him. Pound not alone introduced fresh beauties into the language, but a bounding crew of risque quips, nonsensicalities, buffooneries. The follies may prove his undoing ultimately, but their attack on the bourgeoisie was a tonic his countrymen needed." 20

Perhaps the finest contemporary poem on Christ is given voice in the virile "Ballad of the Goodly Fere." In it the Ideal of the past two thousand years is pictured as a masculine, heroic figure, not the effeminate dreamer usually portrayed by poets.

"A master of men was the Goodly Fere,
A mate of the wind and sea,
If they think they ha' slain our Goodly Fere
They are fools eternally.
I ha' seen him eat o' the honey-comb
Sin' they nailed him to the tree."

"Mr. Housman's Message," a satire on dejected civilization, reveals the versatility of the poet in the opposite range of the scale from the earnest ballad. The first stanza gives the gist of the on-slaught:

"O woe, woe,
People are born and die,
We also shall be dead pretty soon
Therefore let us act as if we were
deaf already."

Some of the poet's immense, but amusing, egotism creeps forth in the following quatrains:

"I dreamt that I was God Himself
Whom heavenly joy immerses,
And all the angels sat about
And praised my verses."

In "Ripostes," dedicated to William Carlos Williams, one encounters the exquisitely austere "4\w/pia" a masculine rendition of H.D.'s spirit:

"Be in me as the eternal moods
of the bleak wind, and not
As transient things are--
gaiety of flowers
Have me in the strong loneliness
of sunless cliffs
And of grey waters.
Let the gods speak softly of us
In days hereafter,
The shadowy flowers of Orcus
Remember thee."
No less exquisite, but more tender and lustral, is "A Virginal," as chaste in spirit as the "white" of "this lady's hours."
"Lustra," is prefaced by half-tremulant quatrain, purely imagistic in tone, which records, perhaps, more than a half-sincere personal note of the no-longer youthful poet:
"And the days are not full enough
And the nights are not full enough
And life slips by like a field mouse
Not shaking the grass."
But immediately the poet remembers his role and sardonically bows to his audience with the audacious "Salutation" to his poems:
"Go, little naked and impudent songs,
Go with a light foot!
... ... ...
Ruffle the skirts of prudes,
speak of their knees and ankles.
But, above all, go to practical people--
go: jangle their door-bells;
Say that you do no work
and that you will live forever."
In the same tone he presents "Further Instructions" and "Commission;" the height of his derision is reached in "The Garret"--
"Come, let us pity those who are better off than we are"—and the mock-horrified "Ancora."

"The Bellaires," "Arides," "The Temperaments," "Amities," "Meditatios," "Ladies," "Phyllidula," etc., are cleverly risque poems which "came to Pound via the Greek and Latin decendants, and are refreshing so long as they are not overdone. When they are good they are very good, but when they are bad they" are not recommendable. These questionable pen-pieces are followed by a group of lyrics of sheer beauty and delicacy: "Fan-Piece, for her Imperial Lord," "Albatre," "Dance Figure," "Heather," "The Gypsy," and "Provincia Deserta." Amusing and expressively eloquent is the modernistic parody on "Ancient Music," followed by the "Note.—This is not folk music, but Dr. Ker writes that the tune is to be found under the Latin words of a very ancient canon."

"Cathay" places us in a Chinese atmosphere, many of the poems are after Nihaku, eighth century A.D. The richest of these are "The River Song," "The River-Merchant's Wife," "Poem By The Bridge At Ten-Shin," "Lament Of The Frontier Guard," "Exile's Letter."

In "Moeurs Contemporaines" we find a delightful group of vigorous sketches devised, undoubtedly, for the audience ever-present in the background of the poet's mental consciousness:

"Upon learning that the mother wrote verses,
And that the father wrote verses,
And that the youngest son was in a publisher's office,
And that the friend of the second daughter was undergoing a novel,
The young American pilgrim exclaimed:
"This is a darn'd clever bunch!"

In "Envoi" (1919) Pound returns briefly to his earlier medium, more sincere and deeper in spirit:

"Go, dumb-born book,
. . . .
Tell her that goes
With song upon her lips
But sings not out the song, nor knows
The maker of it, some other mouth,
May be as fair as hers,
Might, in new ages, gain her worshippers,
When our two dusts with Waller's shall be laid,
Sittings on sittings in oblivion,
Till change hath broken down
All things save Beauty alone."

Too intellectual ever to be popular, and too clever and fame-eager ever to be great, Pound has done much to make American poetry the colorful, many-voiced thing it is, and "if he has not sung out the song, he may still do so; and if he does not, the unfinished song is more moving than bundles of perfect little lyrics by perfect little people."

In contrast to Pound, Alfred Kreymborg is perhaps less important as a leader and more important as a poet. In 1914 he organized that group of radical poets which, half-depreciatingly, half-defiantly, called itself "Others." He edited the three anthologies of their work published in 1916, 1917 and 1919.

"He is a whimsical radical, the leader of whimsical radicals. His poems are like the little oddments one finds while rummaging in an old curiosity shop. Some of them are ridiculous and valueless, some quaint and amusing; a few are beautiful. His
Poorer poems are shadowy and trivial. They lack symmetry of design, charm of rhythm and vitality of emotion. But his best poems make up for certain deficiencies of rhythm and design and rather slight emotion—the most serious lack—by their charm of really delicate fancy and by their quaint symbolism. Their beauty is minute and fragile, like the beauty of a miniature. 21

Passionately interested in music and exceptionally sensitive to it, Mr. Kreymborg has attempted to put into poetry the sense values and perceptive richesses of that kindred art. It is often, he tells us, that his poems are written with a definite musical tempo in mind. Technically, then, we find his work to be somewhat different from what is commonly called free verse or cadenced verse—his work is, in reality, more melodic than metrical. His first attempts were published in "Mushrooms" (1916). "Here Kreymborg continually sought for simplification, cutting away at his lines until they assumed an almost naked expression. Often he overdid his effects, attaining nothing more than a false ingenuousness, a sophisticated simplicity. Often, too, he failed to draw the line between what is innocently childlike and what is merely childish. One sees him frequently trying to strike curious attitudes, tripping over several of his buffooneries and sprawling ingloriously." But an "elfin fantasy and no little beauty of thought are his when he wants to use them." 22

interested in puppets and minature theatres from boyhood, Mr. Kreymborg turned early in his writing career to the theatre as a medium of poetic self-expression. His theories have been developed with surprising success in his "Plays for Poem-Mimes" (1918), and "Plays for Merry Andrews" (1920). These have about them a peculiar puppet-like quality and a characteristic naiveness offset with passages of brilliant color. He sees life "like a perennial adolescent" but "usually his wry smile saves him from childishness."

"Blood of Things" (1920), is "for all surface oddities [says Mr. Untermeyer], the work not only of an ardent experimenter but a serious thinker. Humor is in these pages, but it is humor lifted to a sort of exaltation. Here, in spite of what seems a persistence of occasional charlantancy, is a rich and sensitive imagination; a fancy that is as wild as it is quick-witted."

In a daring flight of imagination he tells us in "Gold-pieces and Hemstitches":

"I'm full of children this morning.
I can feel them
flying kites
all the way up and down my veins."

With a wise, naive seriousness he questions:

"You would say--
a girl of six
is hardly old enough for philosophy--
but you would say, wouldn't you--
a girl of six
is old enough for pain,
old enough to be sought
by the fashionable lover, death,
and his thumbs of strangulation?--"
and in the same grave tone in "Old People", he tells us of the two
tales that would "be told in the same old way--"
"were it not for the preference,
that Life
likes his to end in adventure,
while Death
likes hers to end at home."

Like a modernistic painting are the images in "Triangles: Memory of H.C.K." On "the long tired day"
"The dance of his breathing,
quicker and louder than scraping of feet,
ceases like sap in leaves that are still.

This was a dance like staccato of steel
in the hand of an invisible madman
thrusting the past with the final deep twist."

Playfully tender, exquisitely imaginative in conception,
and phrased in the sheerest of dictons are the short adoring
lyrics in tribute to "Dorothy."
"Her eyes hold black whips--
dart of a whip
lashing, nay, flicking,
nay, merely caressing
the hide of a heart--
and a broncho tears through canyons--
walls reverberating,
sluggish streams
shaken to rapids and torrents,
storm destroying
silence and solitude;"

"Her Hands"--

"Blue veins
of morning glories--

... ... ... ... ...
bring deep-toned silence
after a storm."

The title poem "Blood of Things" presents a unique subjective philosophy through the eyes of various mediums: the pump, puddle, show-case, cigar-indian, letter-box, dust, park-bench, electric sign, etc. In "Coins," the importance of trivialities is distinguished and emphasized:

Silver.

Whether winds chase the clouds,
or clouds chase the winds;
whether shadows the grasses,
or grasses the shadows;
which part of the circle
starts chasing the rest's
unimportant; important
that bodies chase bodies
with undulating,
mythic caresses
of unseen wings;
wings brushing wings.

The wide-eyed, quasi-serious child comes to the surface again in
"Rooms."
"The rooms you leave
seem more sorrowful than faces;
they eye you like animals.

Their dumb service is past;
they have no legs to follow you."

"To Whitman" is a tacit, friendly, boyish tribute paid to the understanding Walt:

"Monster!
You would take me,
tiny me, in your huge paws
and scrunch me?
Child!
I can take you,
tiny you,
between my thumbs
and love you.
Come on!"

In Mr. Kreymborg's later books we find him turning with marked success to the more conservative forms, especially that of the sonnet. Though the forms belong to the past, the content and thought embodied in them is modern both in view point and treatment. We find, too, a richer, quieter note in human nature creeping in and another note, new to one born and bred among subways and elevators, that of natural life, deep, pulsing, restful... Mr. Kreymborg seems in them to have newly-discovered the world of trees and flowers and birds and, like one who has recently come into his heritage, gives voice to this joyous encounter with beauty.

"Less Lonely" (1923), the result of eighteen months
spent in Europe is more distinctive and varied than any of his earlier works. Italy, both in thought material and spirit, dominates the whole book; the city-cramped poet revels in the lavish display of nature, the mellow softness of skies, and the jewelled-dreams that are lakes. But the student of human nature cannot forget his long training and environment and attributes human qualities to everything he sees:

"The mountains have a weary air and glower
At clouds that wind effeminate shawls and scarves
Of black and gray reiterated, wound
About their foreheads, eyes and noses, mouths;"
The new lyric element, softer, blurred, but not less colorful, appears in "Buonarroti," "Evergreen," "Her Voice," and "Contact":

"O flame-shaped cypresses,
trembling in the dark;
Is it your roots
are agrip with craters of the earth,
that your tips
stretch so serenely,
is it they who light the stars?"

"Madonna Di Campagna," prefaced by the note: "These sonnets were composed in isolation, from January to June, 1922, in the village of Madonna Di Campagna, on Lago Maggiore, at the foot of the Simplon Pass, in the Alps of Lombardy," presents a group of sonnets picturing the poet's impressions of the village and the surrounding country, both of the past and present. "If He Were Not Enthralled," "And White the White Invokes," "Melodious the Morning," "Too Intricately Webbed," and "The Mountains Stoop to Hills" are the finer and more charming of this excellent group of modern poems in the sonnet form.
His later books, "Scarlet and Mellow" (1926), "The Lost Sail" (1928), and "Manhattan Men" (1929), display an even more decided return to conservatism in the constant use of metre and rhyme. The first acknowledges, consciously, the turn of the poet's thought to nature in the lyrics to birds and flowers, and contains a number of cleverly philosophical sketches. "Suicide" is in its terse irony, remarkably reminiscent of Robinson:

"Of the man you once made and the man I still am,
There's nothing left now but the man who began
Living up to the love in your whimsical fad—
Certain am I this was all that I had.

"A man has no life but to give what is paid,
There's not an iota of gain in the trade;
One simply reverts to the facts one is fed,
So receive even this plaintive residue dead:

"If there's any more living on me to be done,
Leave the loving below to things under the sod!"
He said, very steadily aiming a gun,
In a hand clearly marking the envelope, "God."

"The Lost Sail" is a volume of more sonnets introduced with the apologetic "Praludium."

"Just as I'd planned to steal a real vacation,
Here am I thrown once more into cold hard quod
By the ever faithful cause of my damnation.
Playing the Pilgrim lass, she sports a bonnet.
Though I'd sworn I'd never start another sonnet!

And excellent sonnets they are too, though their setting this time is on this side of the Atlantic, "on lazy green Cape Cod."
"Manhattan Men" is perhaps the most personal of all of Mr. Kreymborg's volumes; it contains innumerable pictures of the poet's life as a boy and young man, and a group of epigrammatic "Manhattan Epitaphs," and, like Pound, Mr. Kreymborg, with a wry smile acknowledges this one "Lonely Truths:"

"The one lone truth I'm certain of this side the grave: I haven't as long to live as I used to have."

Most perversely individual and solitary of all modern poets Maxwell Bodenheim, the misanthrope, has pursued his lonely way contemptuous of all readers and their ridicules and opinions. He wrote steadily for five years without having a single poem accepted but these very rejections "gave him a measure of notoriety no amount of praise could have duplicated... in the midst of his hatreds, his attacks on enemies, his repeated challenges to critics, Bodenheim is a brilliant tactician and publicist. Scorning the public, he has never lost an opportunity to woo it with shallfire. His appetite for fame at the hands of a country he despises is as sardonic as his most sardonic poem. Latterly, after a long, heart-rending battle with poverty, the poet has won material success through the writing of a swift series of short novels notable for their salacity. Always a prolific writer of poems, plays and essays, the novelist has succeeded where the artist failed. An artist wrote the poems, plays and essays; an economic opportunist wrote the novels." 23

Although his poetry is sharply pictorial, it is not merely imagistic; it is more nearly symbolic. Mr. Bodenheim has, says
Mr. Untermeyer, an "extreme sensitivity to words. Words, under his hands, have unexpected growths; placid nouns and sober adjectives bear fantastic fruit. Sometimes he packs his metaphors so close that they become inextricably mixed. Sometimes he spins his fantasies so thin that the cord of coherence snaps and the poem frays into ragged and unpatterned ravellings. But, at his best, Bodenheim is as clear-headed as he is colorful."

Since 1918, Mr. Bodenheim has issued seven volumes of poetry: "Minna and Myself," "Advice," "Introducing Irony," "Against This Age," "The Sardonic Arm," "Returning to Emotion," "The King of Spain." On the whole his poetry is not beautiful, but it is generously sprinkled with sudden language-jewels, startling in their intensity of imagery. One is delighted and exhilarated upon discovering without warning such exquisite lines as the following: "the trees have lost the diamond violence of Spring." "Music, softer than the dins that rose from Autumn violins." "The song is old but often made by girls who sit in Spring and braid the lanterned language of their hair." "Let the tall wildness of my thought stride beside the thundering grace of the man whose spring-time face brought me tiny notes of rest."

In the third volume, a savage, satirical attack is made upon contemporary poets in "Manners."

"Vulgarity, Sirona, is often a word invented by certain men to defend their disdain for other men, who chuckle at the skulking tyrannies of fashion. Few men, Sirona, dare to become completely vulgar, but many nibble at the fringes."

In "Meditations in a Cemetery" the philosopher realizes that "An aging tree is wiser than an aging poet; and death is wiser than both."

We are told in "Finalities" that "Laughter is a skeleton's applause; grief sells increase to sterility; happiness protects its subtle flaws."

The whole volume is at least novel and unique and furnishes sufficient mental stimulus for those who care to seek with an intellectual viewpoint and observation for the startling though artistic gratification in the strange concepts.

In a "Reluctant Foreword" to the "Sardonic arm", Mr. Bodenheim proceeds to score his contemporary American poets with ironical fineness: "The poetic situation in America is, indeed, a blustering and verbose invitation to boredom and a slight, reviling headache."

"Bravery," he tells us in a portrait, "is fear effectively sneering at itself." And the expression on a child's face is "... the hunted transparency of dawn curving from the white throat of a child and shaken in the still cup of his face."

"With burning tug,
Came her name, almost buried again
By the softly rushing noise of the room.
The silk over my soul was pierced,
And the filmy breast was cut
By something like pointed breath—
(Too utterly thin to be pain)
The little ghost-sword of her name."

are the finest poems in this volume, a much richer and more poetic one than its two companion volumes. It illustrates a heightened, more mature development of the spirit of his earlier volumes.

"The King of Spain" is characterized by amusing notes underscorung some of the poems, which reach the climax in the following: "This poem did not receive an honorable mention in any of the Poetry Prize Contests staged in this country. Why? Because the poem remained in the desk of its author!"

This volume contains several of Mr. Bodenheim's finest poems: "Songs To A Woman," "Street," "Suffering," "Happiness," "The Steam-Shovel," and "Notes on a Face."

"Bodenheim has the right touch for blasting injustice, and he would serve himself better by turning his weapons away from ephemeral critics and training them on the eternal evils and vices infesting the human race. He need not love the race in order to this. Nor need he fall in love with his native land. The land
can use some more honest haters of Bodenheim's stamp. All one asks is that the antipathy rise out of the picayune class and devote itself to the largest issues." 25

With a sardonic appreciation of ironic finalities Mr. Bodenheim has written his own Epitaph:

Epitaph For A Poet

The stone that squats above his head--
Innocuous, revered, complete--
Should leave this rebel-poet's bed.
They threw so many--why repeat?

* Mr. H. L. Mencken would detest this little poem--an excellent testimonial of its worth.

THE NIHILISTS.

"laugh, ... ... ... for life's not a paragraph
And death I think is no parenthesis"
-----E.E. Cummings.

It is with some reluctance and trepidation that one turns from the more or less cultivated fields of modern poetic adventure to the altogether too incomprehensible deserts of imagination of that small band of exiles, T.S. Eliot, E.E. Cummings, Marianne Moore, William Carlos Williams, who dwell beyond the pale of respectable poetic society. Growing out of the War and its after effects, Nihilism has become the blind idol worshipped by this over-zealous group. In stead of the ever-living god, Poetry. They "adopted the aristocracy of the intellect over the cruder emotions, conscious, however, of the fact that the world is ruled, not by the integrity of intelligence, but by the brute instincts, marvelously developed of men who rule the mass of people politically. ... And despair is the keynote of the latest generation;" the world is in chaos.

Due to the necessity, realized by these poets, of com-

pressing into a single image all the complex attitudes of the modern intelligence, there has been evolved a specialized type of imagery which we may call "accumulative." In this type several ideas and emotions together with the object or event upon which they depend are fused into a single image. As a result of this concentrated condensation of ideas and images, the economy of form and the partiality of language are often very obscure.

T.S. Eliot, leading expatriate of our time, has exalted himself to a position of leadership in expounding the doctrine of present-day despair and the crumbling of modern civilization; he is the supreme poet of disillusionment and individualism. His following has been widespread, both in England and America, and loudly vociferous but through the envy of little fellows who would supplant him, it is gradually waning. Profoundly impersonal, Eliot has created a system of objectivity, a microcosmic subjection to the universe, a continual extinction of personality, that is constantly individual and conscious.

The climax of Eliot's dismal theme was reached by the tragic note struck in "The Waste Land," which won the Dial award for 1922. His public recognition began with that award and as it has gradually increased since that time, the poet has, as gradually, been engulfed in the personality of the critic.

Mr. Eliot's early work is the more important; it is curious and sharply original. "Prufrock" appeared in England in 1917, and an American edition, including a number of other verses, was published under the title "Poems" in 1920. The "Portrait of a Lady," and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" are the two outstanding poems of this volume. The following excerpt from "The Love Song" is warmly reminiscent of Carl Sandburg:
"The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes,
Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,
Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,
Let fall upon its back the scot that falls from chimneys,
Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,
And, seeing that it was a soft October night,
Curled once about the house, and fell asleep."

Eliot's ironic rhymed verses, which constitute the bulk of his work, [says Mr. Untermeyer] are in his later style. It is this vein that tempts Eliot most—and is his own undoing. For irony, no matter how agile and erudite—and Eliot's is both—must contain heat if it is to burn. And heat is one of the few things that cannot be juggled by this acrobatic satirist. His lines, for the most part, are a species of mordant light verse; complex and disillusioned vers de société.

Though "The Waste Land" is eight years old, and is virtually the last of Eliot's poems, one needs merely mention the title to start another controversy. It has been received with mingled conflicting cries of derision, hatred, adoration and no little skepticism. To understand the poem, Mr. Kreymborg says "One must try to penetrate the mask of the poet and get at the heart of the man. Despite his impersonal ideal, his will to sacrifice himself at every turn, a man, not a classic tradition, wrote "The Waste Land." This man, intimately conscious of chaotic conditions, suffering the agonies of a race smitten with disillusionment, is enough of an artist-scientist to set things down in apparent detachment. . . Though his imagination wanders among earlier eras, girding itself with heroic traditions, he does not turn on an age to him so inferior, so moribund, as the present or
the recent age. Even though he fails to see any cure for the age, any outcome except in extinction, and finds in the dawn no recrudescence of the glorious past, and no sign of a future worth living in, his catholic mind sets down another imperturbable line compact, not of bitterness, but of wit accepting the horrible facts and shaping an ordered life on paper. "The Waste Land," for all its vagaries and obscenities, its chaotic likeness to a chaotic background, has a definite program and philosophy. 27

The poem itself is an odd jumble of the commonplace, erudite, and the delicately lovely:

"April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

... ... ...

for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water. Only
There is shadow under this red rock,
(Come in under the shadow of this red rock),
And I will show you something different from either
Your shadow at morning striding behind you
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.

... ... ...

"--Yet when we came back, late, from the Hyacinth garden,

27. Alfred Kreymborg, "Our Singing Strength." Chap. XXV, p. 536.
Your arms full, and your hair wet, I could not
Speak, and my eyes failed, I was neither
Living nor dead, and I knew nothing,
Looking into the heart of light, the silence."

Of a grotesque lyrical beauty is "The Fire Sermon?"
"The river's tent is broken; the last fingers of leaf
Clutch and sink into the wet bank. The wind
crosses the brown land, unheard. The nymphs are departed.
Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song.
The river bears no empty bottles, sandwich papers,
Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends
or other testimony of summer nights.

The nymphs are departed.
And their friends, the loitering heirs of city directors;
Departed, have left no addresses.
By the waters of Leman I sat down and wept . . .
Sweet Thames, run softly till I end my song,
Sweet Thames, run softly, for I speak not loud or long.
But at my back in a cold blast I hear
The rattle of bones, and chuckle spread from ear to ear."

IV. Death by Water.

"Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss.

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.

Gentile or Jew
O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you."

With a lyric quietness the poem closes on two quotations from the
tUpanishads. Mr. Eliot notes that "Shantih . . . repeated as here,
is a formal ending to an Upanishad. "The peace which passeth
understanding" is a feeble translation of the content of this word."

"In this decayed hole among the mountains
In the faint moonlight, the grass is singing
Over the tumbled graves, about the chapel
There is the empty chapel, only the wind's home.
It has no windows, and the door swings.
Dry bones can harm no one.

"The sea was calm, your heart would have responded
Gaily, when invited, beating obedient
To controlling hands

I sat upon the shore
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me
Shall I at least set my lands in order?

London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down

These fragments I have shored against my ruins
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad again.

Shantih shantih shantih

E.E. Cummings, the youngest of the Nihilists, is the
most sensational, the most incomprehensible, and the most popular
of the group. He possesses the rollicking spirit of a twelve-
year old boy and a novel twist of the imagination, which coupled with a "private devotion to freakishness or a somewhat childish desire to attract attention at any cost drives him to distort his perfectly creditable lines by preposterous printing devices." But he is really not as eccentric as he looks on paper as will be readily seen by writing out a Cummings poem with conventional punctuation and capitalization, and comparing its effects with the original. Nevertheless one cannot deny his idiosyncracies of form are often highly effective; for instance:

here's a little mouse) and
what does he think about, i
wonder as over this
floor (quietly with
bright eyes) drifts (nobody
can tell because
Nobody knows, or why
jerks Here &; here,
g(coo)vings the room's Silence) this like
a littlest
poem a
(with wee ears and see?

tail frisks

(gone)
The mouse literally frisks across the page before the reader's eyes and disappears with a startling suddeness which could not be portrayed in a conventional manner; the printed word itself is more than half the poem.

"Behind his beautiful gamboling, [says Mr. Kreymborg] one
hears the heart beats, subtle and exquisite, of a poet steeped
in sentiment. He is the love poet of the radical era, and his
love, thanks to an antipathy for the Cambridge school, is denuded
of all save nudity." Perhaps one of his loveliest tributes is
this sincere, though delicate, "Sonnet:"

"If I have made, my lady, intricate
imperfect various things chiefly which wrong
your eyes (frailier than most deep dreams are frail)
songs less firm than your body's whitest song
upon my mind--if I have failed to snare
the glance too shy--if through my singing slips
the very skillful strangeness of your smile
the keen primeval silence of your hair

--let the world say "his most wise music stole
nothing from death"

you only will create
{who are so perfectly alive} my shame:
lady through whose profound and fragile lips
the sweet small clumsy feet of April came

into the ragged meadow of my soul."

"The savage jazz age [he continues] which came to birth
about ten years ago found its best poet in Cummings. He is a
brilliant compound of love, romance, idealism, antipathy, realism,
slang, prohibition, booze, jazz and more jazz. The fact that he
had to publish some of his poems privately, because of their risque
verities, added enormously to his public appeal."

Since 1923 he has published five books of poems: "Tulips
and Chimneys," "&," "XLI Poems," "is S," and "Him," an astounding
poetic play.

As an example of his rich artistry and ingenious imagery we have the delightfully unique "Chansons Innocentes:"

in Just-
spring when the world is mud-
luscious the little
lame balloon man

whistles far and wee

and eddieandbill come
running from marbles and
piracies and it's
spring

when the world is puddle-wonderful

Nothing is more typical of Cummings than his poems on
death—profound with a kind of "dizzy gayety." Suave and robustly
free, one feels and hears reeling, giddy sensations reverberating
in a cosmic emptiness.

Buffalo Bill's
defunct

who used to
ride a watersmooth-silver
stallion

and break onetwothreefourfive pigeons justlikethat

Jesus

he was a handsome man

and what I want to know is

how do you like your blueeyed boy

Mister Death
Not the least of his accomplishments has been the mastery of the "lingo" of the pavement and Coney Island—this he has done to perfection:

Her voice?

gruesome a trull

leaps from the lungs "gimme uh swell fite"

like up ter yknow, Rektuz, Toysday nite;
where uh guy get's gayn troze uh lobstersalad

In the later volumes the typography has grown infinitely more daring:

tå
ppin
g
 toe
hip
 popot
amus Back
gen
teel-ly
lugu-
brious
eyes

LOOPTHELOOP

as

fathandsbangrag

Again Mr. Kreymborg, "Of the many delightful diatribes
on living in America after the Volstead Act, none is more withering than this sonnet:

"next to of course god america i
love you land of the pilgrims' and so forth oh
say can you see by the dawn's early my
country 'tis of centuries come and go
and are no more what of it we should worry
in every language even deafanddumb
thy sons acclaim your glorious name by gorry
by jingo by gee by gosh by gum
why talk of beauty what could be more beautifull than these heroic happy dead
who rushed like lions to the roaring slaughter
they did not stop to think they died instead
then shall the voices of liberty be mute?"

He spoke. And drank rapidly a glass of water

Several poems which undoubtedly grew out of the poet's war experience follow this initial "jolly" exponent of the dependence of meaning upon form:

it's jolly
odd what pops into
your jolly tete when the
jolly shells begin dropping jolly fast you
hear the rrrmp and
then nearerandnearerandNEARER
and before
you can
& we're

Not

(oh--
--i say

that's jolly odd
old thing, jolly
odd, jolly
jolly odd isn't
it jolly odd.

The last half of the volume "is 5" is devoted to a group of exquisitely picturesque lyrics; this one has the soft misty tone of a painting by Whistler:

Paris; this April sunset completely utters
utters serenely silently a cathedral

before whose upward lean magnificent face
the streets turn young with rain,

swirl acres of bloated rose
coiled within cobalt miles of sky
yield to and heed
the mauve

of twilight (who slenderly descends,
daintily carrying in her eyes the dangerous first stars)
people move love hurry in a gently

arriving gloom and

sees (see the new moon
fills abruptly with sudden silver
these torn pockets of lame and begging colour) while there and here the lithe indolent prostitute
Night, argues

with certain houses

The three-act play, "Him," "could have been written by no one but Cummings. Employing every conceivable theatrical, poetical and prose device, the kaleidoscopic scenes dash by with the speed of cinemas. Tragedy, farce, love, sexuality, profanity, buffoonery, wisdom, pornography, idealism, realism, egoism, dualism and death play the very deuce with an audience. It is the most daredevil work of our most daredevil author, and were it not for a recurrence of cute obscenities and tongues in the cheek, one could readily pronounce the play a masterly affair." 28

Though still an adolescent in the field of poetry, Mr. Cummings is a poet of rare promise and refreshing inventiveness. If he can forget himself, and "write straight out from the heart of which he is ashamed and has no reason to be ashamed," he will, without doubt, rank as the major poet of the new criterion.

Marianne Moore, though a prodigious reader of other literatures, has actually written less in bulk than any of her contemporaries. And even the minute quantum of her work can hardly be called poems; she, herself, has termed them "observations."

"Her work is the product of a novel intelligence, a strange sensibility, a unique scholarship. It is woven, as the curious notes manifest, with phrases from neglected books and poor magazines ..."

studded with zoological observations, and illustrated by conversational episodes. The process by which this miscellany is made to focus about her points of view is fascinating—an object lesson in the exploitation of an environment by a mind which, in relation to it, is eccentric." In Miss Moore's work there are abundant beauties which stimulate one's mind and imagination with their exquisite imagery: "Black butterflies with blue half circles on their wings . . . lizards glittering and without thickness . . . the acacia-like lady shivering at the touch of a hand"; "hounds with waists diminishing like the waist of the hourglass"; "the lucid movements of the royal yacht upon the learned scenery of Egypt"; "a speical antelope" standing "its ground on cliffs the colour of clouds, of petrified white vapour . . . the ermine body on the crystal peak."

Mingled and blended with pure rhetoric and bits of conversations, one suddenly finds passages of pure poetry, subtle but clear.

"Plagued by the nightingale
in the new leaves,
with its silence—
not its silence, but its silences . . . ."

"I recall their magnificence, now not more magnificent
than it is dim . . . ."

". . . When the wind is from the east,
the smell is of apples, of hay; the aroma increased and decreased as the wind changes;
of rope, of mountain leaves for florists; as from the west it is aromatic of salt."
With Mr. Cummings, Miss Moore shares a marked visual sensitivity to pictorial form, though she uses not quite so radical a technique as that embodied in the most eccentric of Mr. Cummings' poems.

"I remember a swan under the willows in Oxford
with flamingo colored, maple-leaflike feet. It reconnoitered like a battle ship. Disbelief and conscious fastidiousness were the staple
ingredients in its disinclination to move. Finally its hardihood was not proof against its proclivity to more fully appraise such bits of food as the stream bore counter to it; it made away with what I gave it to eat."

There is nothing haphazard in Miss Moore's effects; she works consciously and carefully. Deliberately pictured we see

"the cat—
that takes its prey to privacy;
the mouse's limp tail hanging like a shoelace from its mouth—" and this of New York harbor:

"the square-rigged four-rigged four-master, the liner, the battleship like the two—

29. Dial. v. 78, p. 239.
thirds submerged section of an iceberg; the tug
dipping and pushing, the bellstriking as it comes; the
steam yacht, lying
like a new made arrow on the
stream;"

Miss Moore is primarily a poet of the intellect; the
emotions and passions are noticeably absent, or at best totally
submerged under the cool impersonality of the poet's reasoning
and logical mind. Her beauty is one of cool detachment, never the
riotous, pulsing thing of her compatriots. Still she writes on
nearly everything under the sun, with the possible exception of
love, and with a witty wisdom at times corrosively satirical.

Often obscurely intellectual, even to poets, Miss Moore
leaves as a defiant challenge to those who find no poetry in her
work an example like the following, a thing compelling, rich,
intriguing in its abstruseness, and its hardness of precision
and impersonality:

"Under a splintered mast,
Torn from the ship and cast
Near her hull,

A stumbling shepherd found
Embedded in the ground,
A seagull

Of lapis lazuli,
A scarab of the sea,
With wings spread--

Curling its coral feet,
Parting its beak to greet
Men long dead."

If such is not poetry, it is an intricate approximation and, at the very least, a valuable and original contribution to literature and art.

From one extreme of individuality let us now turn to the opposite: William Carlos Williams is everything that Marianne Moore is not, and yet one cannot but question if what he has written is poetry. It has a savoury originality—it is "vivid, acridly sensuous, gnarled, by turns delicate and coarse. There is humor in it, too, which is rare enough in contemporary verse. But on the whole it is more amiable than beautiful, more entertaining than successful." 30

Dr. Williams' style, especially that of his later books, has about it something of the deliberate freakishness of Bodeicheim's. At all times extremely unconventional, he self-consciously hides his emotions and passions behind bizarrely colored inhibitions as if he were ashamed of them. There is something in the nature of an ingrained puritanism that constantly prevents him from going below the superficial sensory element into the depths of his consciousness.

"On the technical side [says Mr. Aiken] this puritanism manifests itself in a resolute suppression of beauty. Beauty of

sound he denies himself; beauty of prosodic arrangement too; the cadences are prose cadences, the line-lengths are more or less arbitrary, and only seldom, in a short-winded manner, are they effective... He denies us his emotional reaction to the things he sees, even to the extent of excluding intensity of personal tone from his etchings; and his readers, therefore, have no emotional reactions, either. They see, but do not feel.

"Al Que Quiere" (1917), is perhaps the one and only book of poems that Dr. Williams has published that is worthy of himself as a poet. In it his native town, Rutherford, New Jersey, and his fellow-townsmen and clients find embodiment and expression through the compassionate, understanding eyes of their medico.

"In the sensory organs of Williams, [says Mr. Kreymborg] the dirtiest and tawdriest things are beautiful, and disease no less attractive than health. As a doctor he handles disease with clean hands. Ultimate physical degeneration is present in every outgoing breath of the body. The physician holds the pulse of the patient and the poet the pulse of the physician. The two men in one work side by side and, in between cases and calls at all hours of the day and night, sit down to a poem together."

"My townspeople, beyond in the great world, are many with whom it were far more profitable for me to live than here with you. These whirr about me calling, calling! and for my own part I answer them, loud as I can, and they, being free, pass! I remain! Therefore, listen! For you will not soon have another singer.

First I say this: you have seen
the strange birds, have you not, that sometimes
rest upon our river in winter?
Let them cause you to think well then of the storms
that drive many to shelter. These things
do not happen without reason."

The poet observes nature and reconcile its differences
in his mind, but human nature is not governed by the same laws and
he is puzzled:

"The little sparrows
hop ingenuously
about the pavement
quarreling
with sharp voices
over those things
that interest them.
But we who are wiser
shut ourselves in
on either hand
and no one knows
whether we think good
or evil.

Meanwhile,
the old man who goes about
gathering dog-lime
walks in the gutter
without looking up
and his tread
is more majestic than
that of the Episcopal minister
approaching the pulpit
of a Sunday.

These things
astonish me beyond words."

And again, he doubts the place of "Libertad! Igualdad! Fraternidad!" in America and accepts the fact with a metaphorical shrug of his shoulders:

"You sullen pig of a man
you force me into the mud
with your stinking ash-cart!

Brother!
--if we were rich
we'd stick our chests out
and hold our heads high!

It is dreams that have destroyed us.

There is no more pride
in horses or in rein-holding.
We sit hunched together brooding
our fate.

Well--
all things turn bitter in the end
whether you choose the right or
the left way
and--
dreams are not a bad thing."

There are a number of ecstatic little nature lyrics
which the poet sings out of the pure joy of living. Not so
ecstatic, however, but more amusing and astonishing is the
"Portrait Of A Woman In Bed." She is being doctored by Williams and talks at a violent rate. Charity has tired to care for her, but she has thrust it out.

"Try to help me
if you want trouble
or leave me alone--
that ends trouble.

The county physician
is a damned fool
and you
can go to hell!

You could have closed the door
when you came in;
do it when you go out.
I'm tired."

Mr. Cummings is not alone among love poets of all the group. Nothing could be more exquisitely earnest and tender than this colorful little "Love Song":

"I lie here thinking of you--
the stain of love
is upon the world!
Yellow, yellow, yellow
it eats into the leaves,
smears with saffron
the horned branches that lean
heavily
against a smooth purple sky!
There is no light
only a honey-thick stain
that drips from leaf to leaf
and limb to limb
spoiling the colors
of the whole world--
you far off there under
the wine-red selvage of the west!"

"Kora in Hell:Improvisation" (1920), a volume of poetic prose, and "Sour Grapes" (1921) are not so fine as the first book. There is a too obvious striving after effect which sophistically defeats its own efforts. But these volumes show, if not a development in spirit, at least a decided improvement in diction, both in smoothness and aptitude of word-usage. They are not so pungent as "Al Que Quiere," but are more polished. Familiarity of the poet with his medium has given him a greater skill in wording his thoughts.

One is reminded of the egoism of Pound and amused at the half-seriousness of "The Gentle Man:"

"I feel the caress of my own fingers
on my own neck as I place my collar
and think pityingly
of the kind women I have known."

Though for the present he has forsaken the straight and rugged path of poetry for the broader, less lonely one of fame and recognition, one cannot but regret this action of so fine a poet as Dr. Williams, and wait hopefully for the day when above all things, he will realize that poetry, and nothing but poetry, should be his main concern.
ENVOI.

"We dare not think too long on those who died,
While still so many yet must come to birth."

———William Ellery Leonard.

It has not yet been fifty years since, from the heights of his sturdy individuality, Whitman sounded the clarion call that went ringing throughout the sleeping continent—a challenge, a renaissance. And with the invigorating freshness and vitality of youth, America responded. Before the echoes of that call had ceased reverberating through her cliff-walled mountains and singing over her wind-worn prairies, the white dust drifted slowly backward from the footsteps of travellers eager to be on their way in the cool of the morning. In the growing hour of the dawn, as the saffron-tinted sky deepens into orange, cerise, and rose, with richer tints of violet, cerulean, and mauve blending into the deeper sky of the morning, one stands expectantly, face-eastward, watching the distant moving figures attain the summit of the hill, remain for a moment black against the sky, then disappear into the golden flood of sunlight on the farther slope. And one knows a strangeness, a presentiment, and waits, reluctant to turn away from the flame-bound horizon, lest he miss the advent of one figure that surely must come—and soon; a figure gigantic, superb, unbounded, bearing his burden with the easy grace of strength and the swinging stride of wholesome youth, earnest, vigorous, far-seeing—the great American poet.
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