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The Imagist Amalgams – A Textual Mapping of Richard Aldington's Poems in *Des Imagistes 1914*

The poems written by the Imagists during the mutual poetic experiment originally labelled by Pound *Imagisme*, were included in four major anthologies. Three of them were published by Amy Lowell between the years 1915 - 1917 and had the identical title *Some Imagist Poets*. The first anthology was brought out by Ezra Pound in 1914 and bore the French title *Des Imagistes*. Their content was selected differently. Pound, as was only to be expected, decided everything by himself. He cut, edited and gathered the poems himself, inviting only the poets he deemed worthy of the privilege of being dubbed Imagists. By contrast, Amy Lowell's method was fully democratic as she "suggested that each poet be given equal space in which his or her own selection of poems would appear."¹ The present paper will focus on the poems contributed by Richard Aldington, one of the "founding fathers of Imagism", to the first Imagist anthology entitled *Des Imagistes*.

The group of poems written by Richard Aldington for this anthology proves to be very interesting material for a more detailed presentation of the early stages of the movement when its theoretical assumptions clashed on the one hand with the older tradition and on the other with the individual interests and preferences of particular au-

¹ Steven Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde*, New York, London, Paris: Abbeville Press, 1991, p. 203.

thors. In 1914, when *Des Imagistes* was published, Aldington was 22 years old and on the threshold of launching his first volume of poems *Images 1910 – 1915*, which appeared in print the following year. His involvement with the Imagist movement started as early as 1912 when he met Ezra Pound and together with him and Hilda Doolittle became one of the founders of Les Imagisme, as it was initially called.

One of the most striking features of the group of poems written by Aldington for *Des Imagistes 1914* is their overt *hellenism*. Out of ten poems composed by Aldington seven bear direct reference to classical places or characters with such representative titles as: *Choricos*, *To a Greek Marble*, *Lesbia*, *Argyria*, *Bromios*, *To Athis*, and *In Via Sestina*. On a personal level this fascination with Greece and antiquity in general was certainly inspired by Pound's interests but subsequently it was intensified by his discovery of a kindred soul in Hilda Doolittle. The two shared a mutual fascination with classical culture which soon resulted in their frequent visits to the British Museum where they spent long hours together studying ancient artefacts and drawing inspiration for new poems.

Interestingly enough, the group of poems furnished by Aldington for *Des Imagistes* anthology appears to be dominated by an elegiac mood and contains most of the representative elements of this poetic form.

I. Sorrow

One of the most general and at the same time all-pervading emotions dominant in *Des Imagistes* is the motif of sorrow. It is to be found in all ten poems which he wrote regardless of their thematic content. Thus, we encounter grievous and mournful moods in Hellenic poems like the opening of *To a Greek Marble*, where the speaker laments:

Potnia, Potnia,
White grave goddess,
Pity my sadness,
O Silence of Paros.

This doleful mood becomes even more lugubrious in *Choricos*, where the speaker agonises with a plaintive dirge:

...
I am thy brother,
Thy lover of aforetime crying to thee,
And thou hearest me not.
(*To a Greek Marble*, ll. 1-4, 7-9)

The ancient songs
Pass deathward mournfully,
Cold lips that sing no more, and withered wreaths,
Regretful eyes, and drooping breasts and wings,
Symbols of ancient songs
Mournfully passing
Down to the great white surges,
Watched of none
Save the frail sea-birds
And the lithe pale girls,
Daughters of Okeanus.
(*Choricos*, ll. 1-11)

Likewise, poems which are thematically more universal, like *Beauty Thou Hast Hurt Me Overmuch*, are also permeated with lachrymose sentiments:

The light is a wound to me.
The soft notes
Feed upon the wound.
Where wert thou born
O thou woe
That consumest my life?
Wither comest thou?
Toothed wind of the seas,
No man knows thy beginning.
As a bird with strong claws
Thou woundest me,
O beautiful sorrow.
(*Beauty Thou...*, ll. 1-12)

Sometimes this overwhelming dejection is expressed less directly by means of a compressed visual icon so characteristic of the Imagists, as in a poem entitled *Lesbia*:

And through it all I see your pale Greek face;
Tenderness makes me as eager as a little child
To love you

You morsel left half cold on Caesar's plate.
(*Lesbia*, ll. 10-13)

II. Loneliness

The second formative dominant of Aldington's poems in *Des Imagistes* may be broadly labelled as an elegiac mood of loneliness. Both the lyrical ego of the poems and the personae who function as mask of the speaker or his imaginary companions feel lonesome and forlorn. Potnia, "the white grave goddess", lives in a silent and abandoned world of the past:

I have whispered thee in thy solitudes
Of our loves in Phrygia,
The far ecstasy of burning moons
When the fragile pipes
Ceased in the cypress shade,
And the brown fingers of the shepherd
Move over slim shoulders;
And only the cicada sang.
(*To a Greek Marble*, ll. 10-17)

The gloomy atmosphere is even more intensified by the appearance of such characters as Death who, like the addressee of *Choricos*, sweep like a mighty wind across the lonely stretches of desolate seas reminiscent of the landscapes depicted in the great Anglo-Saxon elegie *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*:

O Death,
Thou art an healing wind

That blowest over white flowers
A-trembling with dew;
Thou art a wind flowing
Over dark leagues of lonely sea:
Thou art the dusk and the fragrance;
Thou art the lips of love mournfully smiling;
(*Choricos*, ll. 46-53)

Similar impressions of estrangement are evoked by such images as the already quoted final line of *Lesbia*: "You morsel left half cold on Caesar's plate". In most poems in which the speaker is strongly delineated we see him as a reclusive and companionless person, as in *The River*:

I drifted along the river
Until I moored my boat
By these crossed trunks.

Here the mist moves
Over fragile leaves and rushes,
Colourless waters and brown fading hills.
(*The River*, ll. 1-6)

Then again, we find this pensive eremite even in such "joyful" poems as *Au Vieux Jardin*, whose opening lines promise a hope for momentary joy however fleeting it might be:

I have sat here happy in the gardens,
Watching the still pool and the reeds
And the dark clouds
Which the wind of the upper air
Tore like the green leafy boughs
Of the diverse-hued trees of late summer;
(*Au Vieux Jardin*, ll. 1-6)

What this gorgeous view brings instead is a bitter-sweet feeling which turns out to be another key motif of Aldington's cycle.

III. Nostalgia

As can be seen in the second half of *Au Vieux Jardin*, the poem introduces the third elegiac dominant pervading Aldington's poems in this collection: nostalgia:

But though I greatly delight
In these and the water lilies,
That which sets me mightiest to weeping
Is the rose and white colour of the smooth flag-stones,
And the pale yellow grasses
Among them.

(*Au Vieux Jardin*, ll. 7-12)

The feeling may be described as some inexplicable pining, a yearning for moments, places and people who are no longer here. Such is also depicted in Aldington's poems, includes dynamic pictures of untamed the mournful tone of the concluding lines of *To Athis*:

And the light fades from the bitter sea
And in like manner from the rich-blossoming earth;
And the dew is shed upon the flowers,
Rose and soft meadow-sweet
And many-coloured meliote.
Many things told are remembered of sterile Athis.
I yearn to behold thy delicate soul
To satiate my desire...

(*To Athis*, ll. 10-17)

Similarly, in *Argyria*, the Arcadian god Pan bewails the absence of *Argyria* in words full of wistful lament:

Swallow-fleet,
Sea-child cold from waves,
Slight reed that sang so blithely in the wind,
White cloud the white sun kissed into the air;
Pan mourns for you.

White limbs, white song,
Pan mourns for you.

(*Argyria*, ll. 8-14)

IV. The Past

Closely linked with nostalgia is the fourth dominant of elegiac profundity. It may be succinctly designated as the past, the proverbial "ould lang syne". In accordance with what we have noticed about the thematic uniformity of Aldington's poems, most of them are either situated in, or more or less directly refer to, Hellenic antiquity "in the silver days of the earth's dawning" (*Choricos*). In these poems we encounter the entire pantheon of gods, deities and mortals. All but complete list would include such *personae* as: Hermes, Pan, Bacchus, Io, Proserpine, Lesbia, the Maenads, fauns and satyrs as well as the Egyptian deities Isis, Osiris and Thoth. The ancient world of the past depicted in Aldington's poems, includes dynamic pictures of untamed Dionysian feasts - like the one we find for example in *Bromios*:

Lo! the fauns and the satyrs.
...
They have wine in heavy craters
Painted black and red;
Wine to splash on her white body.
...
Hear the rich laughter of the forest,
The cymbals,
The trampling of the panisks and the centaurs.
(*Bromios*, ll. 6, 9-11, 31-33)

The recollections of past joy are also evoked in more visionary lines like the concluding lines of the already quoted poem addressed *To Athis* in which the subtle interplay of colours, shifting light and flower imagery brings sensual thoughts about beloved woman. More importantly, even the poems which avoid Hellenic allusions and instead bear reference to the present point to this immediate reality by means of images or *personae* from history or myth. It seems that such an anachronistic representation intensifies even more the elegiac suggestiveness of the poems by making them universal, timeless utterances:

O daughter of Isis,
Thou standest beside the wet highway
Of decayed Rome,
A manifest harlot.

Straight and slim art thou
As a marble phallus;
Thy face is the face of Isis
Carven

As she is carven in basalt.
And my heart stops with awe
at the presence of the gods,

There beside thee on the stall of images
Is the head of Osiris
The lord.

(In the Via Sestina, ll. 1-14)

Likewise, the doleful words of the speaker addressed to the "white grave goddess" Potnia reverberate with the dead echo of quiescence:

I have told thee of the hills
And the hiss of reeds
And the sun upon thy breasts,

And thou hearest me not,
Potnia, Potnia,
Thou hearest me not.

(To a Greek Marble, ll. 17-22)

This acute apprehension of life's impermanence brings pain which aggravates the sense of instability which, in turn, is heard in the responding questions asked by the speaker of *Beauy Thou Hast Hurt Me Overmuch*:

Where wert thou born
O thou woe
That consumest my life?
Wither comest thou?

(*Beauy*... ll. 4-7)

V. Evanescence

The penultimate thematic dominant governing Aldington's poems in this collection may be labelled evanescence. Analogously to the operation of other dominants, this time an overwhelming mood of impermanence and the transitoriness of existence is to be felt in the majority of these poems. The poem which demonstrates most fully this tendency we have highlighted above is *The River*, whose second part brings into focus the unified image of mist, evening, water, and a leaf and combines it with the unspeakable pain of man's awareness of the fragility of our life, love and happiness:

She has come from beneath the trees,
Moving within the mist,
A floating leaf.

O blue flower of the evening,
You have touched my face
With your leaves of silver.

Love me for I must depart.
(*The River*, ll. 7-13)

VI. Death

The final dominant permeating the gloomy atmosphere of Aldington's poems may be appropriately designated death. His poems in this collection like "[t]he ancient songs/[p]ass deathward mournfully" (*Choricos*). The speaker of Aldington's poems resembles the anonymous poet of the Anglo-Saxon elegy *The Wanderer*, who laments that "No man is living, no comrade left" and soon concludes that "Here wealth is fleeting, friends are fleeing/Man is fleeting, mad is fleeing."² Thus, in Aldington's poem *Lesbia* the speaker becomes painfully aware of the cruel toll of death:

² Frank Kermode & John Hollander (eds.), *The Oxford Anthology of English Literature*, New York, London, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1973, vol. 1, p. 104.

And Picus of Mirandola is dead;
And all the gods they dreamed and fabled of,
Hermes, and Thoth, and Christ, are rotten now,
Rotten and dank.

(*Lesbia*, ll. 6-9)

Similarly agonising is Pan's mournful jeremiad, expressed by means of sharp, direct images in the conclusion of *Argyria*:

Sea-child cold from waves,
Slight reed that sang so blighly in the wind,
White cloud the white sun kissed into the air;
Pan mourns for you.
White limbs, white song,
Pan mourns for you.

(*Argyria*, ll. 9-14)

However, the dominant motif of death is most fully developed in *Choricos*. This intense poem appears to be an attempt to come to terms with the destructive yet inevitable operation of time's messenger - Death. The opening stanzas, before Death proper is evoked directly, subtly create sense of receding, passing away, and drifting imperceptibly "down to the great white surges". As the speaker looks back at the people and places of the past he realises the truth which is transitory we be all day"³

For silently
Brushing the fields with red-shod feet,
With purple robe
Searing the flowers as with a sudden flame,
Death,
Thou hast come upon us.

This only remains:
That we turn to thee,

³ Kernode & Hollander, op. cit., p. 389.

Death,
That we turn to thee, singing
One last song.

(*Choricos*, ll. 32-36, 40-44)

In keeping with the overall elegiac mood, there is no struggle or rebellion on the part of the speaker against Death's "rotten and dank hand". Instead, Death turns out to be a culmination, or still better, a consummation of man's existence when "the illimitable quietude comes gently upon us":

And silently,
And with slow feet approaching,
And with bowed head and unlit eyes,
We kneel before thee:
And thou, leaning towards us,
Caressingly layest upon us
Flowers from thy thin cold hands,
And smiling as a chaste woman
Knowing love in her heart,
Thou stealst our eyes
And the illimitable quietude
Comes gently upon us.

(*Choricos*, ll. 70-81)

Conclusion

Our comprehensive analysis of the emotional dominants in Aldington's poems should at this stage be supplemented with an outline of the visual dominants employed by him in the effort of unifying the mood with the image. Our preliminary study and subsequent ample quotations show that the emotional dominants exploited most effectively by Aldington in his poems are mostly built upon the generic components of the poetic form of the elegy. On the other hand, the use of specific imagery, or visual dominants as we may call them, implies that the poems may be governed unobtrusively by yet another poetic genre. The form which appears to share most of its core imagery with Aldington's poems is the pastoral poem. Although the term *pastoral* has been variously defined in recent years and it would probably be

impossible to arrive at one complete definition of this form, the major LUBELSKIE MATERIAŁY NEOFILOLOGICZNE NR 27/2003

ity of pastoral poems, regardless of their bias, employ a coherent set of images which characterise the form and the reality it presents. Also, it should be made absolutely clear that the postulated analogy between Aldington's poems in *Des Imagistes* and pastoral poetry in general should be exclusively limited to the use of comparable imagery and should not be extended to thematic equivalencies. Therefore, with the exception of *Via Sestina* and *Lesbia*, all the poems by Aldington in this collection appear to draw extensively on pastoral imagery. Hence, as was amply demonstrated in the quotations, the presented world of Aldington's poems depicts arboreal, hilly and woody areas covered with lush greenery and located close to the sea or a river. Even a cursory reference to this group of poems enables us to select the following groups of images of a pastoral nature: in *The River* we find a leaf, mist, trees, evening and river; in *Argyria* reeds, leaves, water, waves, swallow; in *To a Greek Marble* hills, reeds, the sun, pipes, a shepherd in *To Arthis* the sun, the moon, stars, flowers, sea, rose, dew; in *Bromios* reeds, pipes, wind, boughs, sea-ripples, grasses and forest; in *Choricos* a wave, a leaf, flowers, water, wind, hills, the sea, the moon, poppies, a garden etc.

It is probably at this level that we are able to notice more clearly this seminal *cross-fertilisation* of the elements of these two poetic genres: the elegy and the pastoral. Their mutual interaction is responsible for the unique placid-nostalgic atmosphere of the poems. Moreover, Aldington's technique of composing poems turns out to be truly Modernist technique of *composite amalgamation* of heterogeneous elements with the creative intention of forming a new compound multi-form work.

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Zum Head-Status von Präfixen im Deutschen

In einer Sprachgemeinschaft besteht ein großer Bedarf an Neuwörtern, weil die Auseinandersetzung mit der vielseitigen Wirklichkeit weitergeht. Bei der Wortbildung des deutschen Verbs haben die Präfixe an Häufigkeit und Funktionswichtigkeit zugenommen. *Entibelh, ent-* in *kirchlichen, verschlanken* - das sind die neuen Präfixbildungen im Deutschen. Welche von denen sich auf Dauer durchsetzen werden, ist kaum vorzusagen, welche von ihnen akzeptabel sind - darüber werden die Meinungen auseinandergehen. Diese aktuellen Beispiele weisen aber auf die Relevanz und Produktivität der Präfixe. Daher lässt sich die Struktur von Präfixbildungen und speziell den Head-Status von Präfixen in der Wortstruktur erörtern. Der Begriff *Head einer Konstruktion*, verstanden als die prägende Konstituente der Konstruktion, gehört zu den wertvollen Einsichten der traditionellen Syntax. Der Head einer Phrase ist der Bestandteil der Phrase, der die gleichen Eigenschaften wie die Phrase besitzt und auch die gleiche Distribution mit ihr teilt; *Kind* als Head der Nominalphrase *das weinende Kind*. Der Kopf einer syntaktischen Phrase ist die Konstituente, die die gleichen kategorialen Merkmale wie die Phrase aufweist, aber eine Stufe tiefer in der hierarchischen Konfiguration steht. Dies wird im X-Bar-Schema direkt zum Ausdruck gebracht, für jede syntaktische Kategorie wird festgelegt, dass sie obligatorisch eine gleiche Kategorie unmittelbar dominiert, die ein Bar-Level weniger umfasst.