

SHORT FORM AMERICAN POETRY

The Modernist Tradition



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Ezra Pound, H.D. and Imagism

While Imagism is typically given foundational status in the modernist line of anglophone poetry, it was produced by a grouping as confected and irregular as any in the long history of twentieth-century avant-gardes. Ezra Pound, obviously, is central to this conversation, but in this chapter I will also pay close attention to H.D., whose poetry was the most rigorous exemplar of imagist practice (even if Pound remained for many poets of the modernist line the pre-eminent model). I discuss austerity, clarity and directness in this writing, and the complex relationship that Imagism has with figures of the inexpressible, both in its highly mediated adaptations of poetry of the French symbolist tradition and in the literature of ancient Greece, China and Japan.

The relationship between the empirical and short form is usually taken as implicit by poets of the imagist and post-imagist line: a reduced style becomes an inevitable concomitant of this mode of writing. Yet the use of ellipsis and the handling of the linebreak in this poetry go a long way beyond the eschewal of ornamentation. There is a contradiction between the reduced style and the empirical ambitions of such poets – the desire for direct statement as a means of forging a relationship between object and artwork that is unmediated by the artifice of poetic language. The compression and ellipsis that characterises such writing, even at the level of the sentence, works against conventional sense-making, preventing the poetry from representing the things of the world with anything approaching directness.

However, the presentation of a demystified and unvarnished image of the world – Pound's ambition for a literature of 'precision' in the rendering of 'external nature, or of emotion'¹ – remained integral to the stated ambitions of many poets of the post-imagist line. In 1934, Pound wrote as though lack of precision in language use was ultimately responsible for the political catastrophes of his time:

As language becomes the most powerful instrument of perfidy, so language alone can riddle through the meshes. Used to conceal meaning, used to blur meaning, to produce the complete and utter inferno of the past century . . . against which, SOLELY a care for language, for accurate registration by language avails.²

Language, in this view, was both the problem (the blur) and the solution (accuracy). The goal of the new poetry was to achieve an austere clarity that was at odds with the ‘rhetorical din and luxurious riot’ that characterised (to his eyes and ears) late Victorian verse.³ Such restraint was rarely achieved by the imagists, even at their early best. In what follows, I will focus on the period 1914–16 that corresponds to the first two anthologies of imagist writing – *Des Imagistes* (1914, edited by Pound) and *Some Imagist Poets* (1915, edited by Richard Aldington and H.D.) – Pound’s *Cathay* (1915) and H.D.’s first poetry collection *Sea Garden* (1916), which contains most of her contributions to the two early anthologies.

How can we assess ‘direct treatment’ when ellipsis is a key principle of the poem’s operation? If the poet goes beyond excising ‘rhetorical din and luxurious riot’ and cuts into the syntactical and referential integrity of the poem, then, of necessity, the constituent elements of the poem, and the relationships between them, communicate meaning in a way that depends as much on what is missing as on what is present. For many of the early imagists, this missing element is a fundamental part of the poem, the unsaid coming to stand for the unsayable. Compression becomes a way of gesturing at extra-poetic emotional or even spiritual content that is otherwise felt to be inexpressible. In such writing, the spaces in the text soon become charged with an air of ineffability. However, the most valuable impetus of Imagism and the ensuing tradition discussed in this book is to potentialise opacity in ways that are not susceptible to such mystificatory co-option. The effects of ellipsis are undeniably hard to define or to assign a use to. Often they arise from the points at which the poem’s communicative mission fails. They emerge as expressive residues left behind by acts of excision. The writers discussed in this study go far beyond the rejection of superfluity, reaching a point at which intelligibility – and thus any criterion of redundancy – is itself at issue. This is not, however, the point at which this line of poetic thought collapses in self-contradiction. Rather, it is where the poetry’s more enduring strengths lie.

The critic and occasional poet Hulme, an early theorist of Imagism, called for economy in poetry. His 1908 ‘Lecture on Modern Poetry’ emphasises clear definition: ‘This new verse resembles sculpture rather than music; it appeals to the eye rather than to the ear. It has to mould

images, a kind of spiritual clay, into definite shapes.⁴ And, in his 'Romanticism and Classicism', he called for 'accurate, precise and definite description'.⁵ Pound admired Hulme enough to include five poems by the English poet-critic at the end of his own *Ripostes* (1912), albeit under the career-terminating heading of 'Complete Poetical Works' (Hulme was still in his twenties). Hulme was a member, with F. S. Flint, of the Poets' Club that met in 1908 and the subsequent 'school of images' grouping, whose meetings Pound began to attend in spring 1909). Like Pound, Hulme had a distrust of a formlessness and excess, which he aligned with a feminised emotiveness: 'I object to the sloppiness which doesn't consider that a poem is a poem unless it is moaning or whining about something or other.' Hulme advocated a return to a particular conception of classicism: one whose hard lines stood out against the 'sloppiness' of the romantic legacy. 'It is essential', he argued, 'to prove that beauty may be in small, dry things.'⁶

The word 'thing', corresponding to a kind of enigmatic objecthood, emerges at key points in Hulme's argument against abstraction. 'Poetry', he argues, 'always endeavours to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical *thing*, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process. It chooses fresh epithets and fresh metaphors, not so much because they are new, and we are tired of the old, but because the old cease to convey a physical *thing* and become abstract counters.' In this view, poetry aspires to the directness of a physical encounter with the world of objects. Cliché, for Hulme, is located in the disappearance of the physical immediacy of the fresh utterance. 'Images in verse are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language', he continues. Whatever the nature of the verse, the poet should avoid 'conventional language' in order to capture the 'exact curve of the thing'.⁷ Poetry is a privileged form that can innovate in this way. Conventional sense-making is at odds with the intuitive immediacy that poetry can communicate, and that immediacy corresponds more nearly to lived experience than mere intellectual endeavour. The new free verse has, crucially, a smaller compass of attention and reference than more conventional forms: 'the modern . . . no longer deals with heroic action, it has become definitely and finally introspective and deals with expression and communication of momentary phrases in the poet's mind'.⁸

As Hulme rejects slop in his pursuit of exactness, Pound rejects 'slush' and 'slither'. For Pound, the new poetry 'will be as much like granite as it can be . . . We will have fewer painted adjectives impeding the shock and stroke of it . . . austere, direct, free from emotional slither.'⁹ It is striking that directness and emotion are held to be opposites. The concision that is recommended goes beyond the economical use of language,

to encompass a rational cast of mind. In Richard Sieburth's reading, 'this passage combines a discernibly American, puritanical suspicion of ornament with a functionalist asceticism that we have come to recognize as a characteristic feature of the international style of high modernism'.¹⁰ Such functionalism would later be evident in Williams's machinic conception of the poem. However, in much of the poetry that appears in the first two imagist anthologies, all of the slither and slop is reassigned to the margins of poems that, although brief, gesture clumsily at unspoken immensities.

It is striking that neither Pound nor Hulme in their various statements specifically encourage either short poems or short lines. Imagist theory aimed to bypass most of the figurative techniques that, for preceding generations, constituted the essence of the poetic. In Sieburth's terms, Pound was hostile to a decorative rhetorical mode that 'turns or tropes the poem away from the "thing" by foregrounding the literariness or intransitivity of the poetic utterance at the expense of its communicative function'.¹¹ Yet Pound signally fails in this regard, as do many of the poets and theorists he enlisted in support of his cause. For the more effective of Pound's followers, the technique of compression makes a virtue of the very 'intransitivity of the poetic utterance' that was supposedly outlawed by his commitment to directness.

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Imagism emerged not merely as an ideology of immediacy, a rhetoric of directness: it was also grounded in a commitment to insufficiency that had origins both in symbolism and in a form of literary orientalism. This dual debt to non-anglophone forebears has been widely discussed in literary criticism of the past half century. Although, of course, concision is noted in passing in almost any discussion of imagist poetics, the question of insufficiency has not received comparable attention. Frank Kermode, in a relatively early study, usefully argues that the Poundian aspiration to immediacy, a revelatory sympathy between word and object, is obstructed by the impossibility of jettisoning the prosaic and practicing Hulme's 'intuitive language':

Pound, like Hulme, like Mallarmé and many others, wanted a theory of poetry based on the non-discursive *conchetto*. In varying degrees they all obscurely wish that poetry could be written with something other than words, but since it can't, that words may be made to have the same sort of physical presence 'as a piece of string' [Hulme]. The resistance to words in their Image is explained by the fact that words are the means of a very different sort of communication; they are so used to being discursive that it is almost impossible to stop them discoursing.¹²

Words are not enough for these writers, in Kermode's view. Poetic language communicates something incommunicable by other means. Yet this is made present in poetry that, in its most naked form, seeks to share the mute and obdurate qualities of an object in the world. Clearly, there is a contradiction between the impulse to gesture at what words cannot capture (a legacy of Imagism's debt to symbolism) and the aspiration to direct statement. This contradiction is critical for our understanding of the role of concision in the early period of Imagism.

In his influential book *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, Arthur Symons praises Mallarmé for his attention to the specifically poetic qualities of language and celebrates the precision of Mallarmé's writing: 'Words, he has realised, are of value only as a notation of the free breath of the spirit; words, therefore, must be employed with an extreme care, in their choice and adjustment, in setting them to reflect and chime upon one another; yet least of all for their own sake.'¹³ Language here is only a secondary 'notation' of something more profound. The 'extreme care' Symons recommends in choosing and adjusting words might be read as an anticipation both of Pound's call for a 'care for language, for accurate registration' and the avoidance of conventional language counselled by Hulme. Yet for Symons, this care is a conduit to the 'free breath of the spirit': clarity, economy and precision open on to the ineffable.

While Pound and others sought to bypass the hieratic stance and metaphysical freight of symbolism, a symbolist commitment to an especially intense mode of signification became a central feature of early modernist poetics.¹⁴ And, moreover, a metaphysical charge is frequently evoked in the imagist commitment to the conspicuously insufficient utterance. Many readers and students of imagist poetry are struck by the gaping void between imagist theory – as expressed in the famous 'Don'ts' and other now-canonical statements – and the actual writing that was published in *Des Imagistes* and *Some Imagist Poets*. In this poetry, there is a striking prevalence of motifs of solitariness, loneliness, bereftness, abandonment and incompleteness. A swooning male sensibility, at once narcissistic and masochistic, persisted well into the twentieth century, with numerous poets signalling access to an elevated literary plane in figures of mournful insufficiency. An example of this voice can be found in the villanelle in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. In that book the poem's function is parodic, though it stems from Joycean juvenilia dating from 1900. In this poetic study in languid desire, the male speaker communicates unrequited love in language of sacramental intensity:

Are you not weary of ardent ways,
Lure of the fallen seraphim?
Tell no more of enchanted days.

Your eyes have set man's heart ablaze
And you have had your will of him.
Are you not weary of ardent ways?¹⁵

The villanelle is treated ironically in the novel, with much of the force of the irony deriving from the gap between the novel's sophisticated and knowing use of literary form and the outdated tenor of the protagonist's own art. Yet Joyce's contribution to the 1914 anthology *Des Imagistes*, 'I Hear an Army', which evokes a clangorous Celtic dreamscape, ends on a similar note of dereliction: 'My heart, have you no wisdom thus to despair?/ My love, my love, my love, why have you left me alone?' While Joyce never identified himself as an imagist, this quality of despairing solitude is apparent in numerous imagist texts. F. S. Flint's 'A Swan Song' is a case in point, published in his *In the Net of Stars* (1909) and then re-edited along imagist lines as 'The Swan' for *Des Imagistes*. The pre-imagist and imagist¹⁶ versions are often compared as a way of illustrating imagist methods. When the figure of poet-speaker emerges in the first version, he is again weary, languid and sick of life. A brief example will suffice:

And, Earth! my heart is weary this hot noon
Of bearing life, your strange and secret gift.
Lying upon this bank, I hear the rune
Of springtime music, with my soul adrift
Upon its stagnant waters, wondering why
Thus rudderless I float askirt a shore,
A drear savannah, Death.

With ardent eye,
Inflamed with dreams of death and ancient lore,
The wild swan watched and waited for the end
Two hundred years of life its white wings bore.
And I in weary truth my song would blend, —
O heart of sombre lilies, why not now? —¹⁷

This, from Pound's point of view was how *not* to do poetry. The poem exhibits many of the tropes he was attacking when calling for a poetry that is 'austere, direct, free from emotional slither': the symbolism of the swan, the forlorn posture of the poet, the archaisms ('rune', 'drear', 'ardent'), the metaphysics ('my soul adrift') and heavy-handed metaphor (swans, lilies, song, etc). The second version of the poem appeared in *Des Imagistes* (1914), following robust advice from Pound, and it greatly benefitted from Pound's criticisms:

Under the lily shadow
and the gold
and the blue and mauve
that the whin and the lilac
pour down on the water,
the fishes quiver.

Over the green cold leaves
and the rippled silver
and the tarnished copper
of its neck and beak,
toward the deep black water
beneath the arches
the swan floats slowly.

Into the dark of the arch the swan floats
and into the black depth of my sorrow
it bears a white rose of flame.¹⁸

While the poem is a great deal shorter than the original, it seems unable to prevent itself from sinking, after two relatively economical stanzas of free verse, into a quagmire of sacramental melancholia. It depends on a clichéd image of inspiration: the awakening of the sluggish poetic soul in the encounter with the flaming spirit represented by the swan. As in the example from Joyce, the poem speaks from a position of insufficiency, looking outside the poem for completion. This gesture, combining spiritual or emotional lack with terse poetic form, is discernible in numerous texts in the period under discussion.

Flint was both a promoter of contemporary French poetry and one of the first literary critics to argue for the virtues of oriental verse. A preoccupation with the orient was nothing new in early twentieth-century London. Indeed, it was visible in the work of numerous artists, artisans and thinkers, from Horace Walpole through Whistler to Herbert Giles's translations from the Chinese and Lafcadio Hearn's books devoted to the mystique of Japan.¹⁹ In the US, Henry David Thoreau's interest in Confucius provided an American model for the young Pound. Pound would deepen his knowledge of oriental literature through dialogue with Allen Upward, W. B. Yeats, Laurence Binyon and Yone Noguchi, and through his encounter with the unpublished materials on Japanese and Chinese literature passed on to him in 1913 by the widow of the scholar Ernest Fenellosa.

Flint makes the connection between symbolism and short-form Japanese poetry in an important review in the 11 July 1908 issue of the *New Age*.²⁰ Flint argues that Japanese literature – or rather, a highly orientalist reading of Japanese poetry – was of signal importance to the vanguard of anglophone poetry. Directness and concision are critical

to the aesthetic he is seeking to describe. In his review he discusses several new works of poetry, including ‘Sword and Blossom Song’, by T. Hasegawa. In praising Hasegawa, Flint gives two examples of ‘haikai’, which he had found in the writings of the French critic Paul-Louis Couchoud and translated himself (thus prefiguring the highly mediated and layered translation-of-translation found in Pound’s translations from both Chinese and Japanese):

Alone in a room
Deserted —
A peony.

and:

A fallen petal
Flies back to its branch:
Ah! a butterfly!

Couchoud’s writings were an important influence on Flint. The French critic identifies brevity as the key impulse in Japanese poetry and questions the falsifying narrative implications brought by a ‘chain’ of connected words:

Above all, Japanese poetry avoids wordiness and explanation. A single flower lies by itself on the snow. Bouquets are forbidden. The poem springs from an instantaneous lyric impulse, that wells up before thinking or passion have directed or made use of it . . . Words are the obstacle. The chain of words introduces an elementary order that is already artificial.²¹

Flint’s remarks communicate a similar aesthetic of reduction.²² The figure of the ‘single flower’ would become a common imagist trope. He repeats Couchoud’s assertion that in Japanese poetry, ‘the half-said thing is dearest’²³ and then draws a parallel with the work of Mallarmé. Flint shares Couchoud’s conviction that in the return to ancient Japanese literature there lies a pathway to the absolutely modern, a fulfilment of Mallarmé’s obscure ambitions. He remarks that for ‘the poet who can catch and render, like these Japanese, the brief fragments of his soul’s music, the future lies open’. It is the idea of curtailment, not the image or symbol or the ‘soul’s music’ that is the greatest innovation. Brevity is held to be indicative of unachievable fullness: a means of gesturing in language at what is inarticulable (in Flint’s conventionally metaphysical terminology, the music of the soul – an echo of Symons’s ‘notation of the free breath of the spirit’). This truncation is imbued with a singular pathos: a solitary flower that is not simply alone but abandoned (‘deserted’). In the second example, the fallen petal, the essence of

japonisme, is resurrected in the butterfly, thus embodying tropes about the cyclical quality of nature, the flight of verse, and the unreliability of human perception. Both poems seem to redirect poetic perception from human subjectivity – the speaker is not psychologised and the apparent goal of each poem is simply to narrate an event in the natural world. Yet the pathos of fragile, forlorn beauty drives each poem, and, significantly, the formal quality of truncation points outside the poem. Something powerful, moving but unsayable is supposedly communicated by the petals delineated with such expressive economy.

Neither of Flint's culturally displaced haikus, of course, follows the formal rules that govern the Japanese haiku. However, it is clear from Flint's surrounding remarks that the short line is held to be instrumental in capturing the glancing instant of epiphanic perception that the poet seeks to communicate. The arrestedness of these lines is, in other words, a means of expressing the 'half-said thing'. Full statement is implicitly equated with the long line. Flint goes on to say that nature will drive the new poetry. He asserts that it will set aside traditional form and 'prefer more subtle rhythms and broken cadences, the song that will come and go like the wind on the leaf or the bourdon of a blond bee hovering over a bank of swaying mignonette' (thus combining both orientalist and French clichés).

The pathos of the solitary flower or petal or leaf can be found in numerous imagist texts. Aldington's 'The River', published in *Des Imagistes*, captures the melancholic super-position of flower and departure:

O blue flower of the evening,
 You have touched my face
 With your leaves of silver.
 Love me for I must depart.²⁴

His 'Choriços' draws a masochistic link between flowers and the ministrations of a personified and feminised Death:

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 sealest our eyes
 And the illimitable quietude
 Comes gently upon us.²⁵

Another example is found in the pathos of Flint's '[The grass is beneath my head]':

Each leaf of the aspen
is caressed by the wind,
and each is crying.

And the perfume
of invisible roses
deepens the anguish.²⁶

And John Cournos's prose poem 'The Rose', also published in *Des Imagistes*, fuses rose, human heart and death:

I threw the rose into the sea, and watched it, caught in the wave, receding,
red on the snow-white foam, paler on the emerald wave.

And the sea continued to return it to me, again and again, at last no longer
a flower, but strewn petals on restless water.

So with the heart, and with all proud things. In the end nothing remains but
a handful of petals of what was once a proud flower . . .

Far from approximating the rhythms of the natural world, such writing invests plants with meaningful weight that is dependent on highly wrought post-symbolist artifice. The relative fragility of plant-life serves as a convenient vehicle for a morbid insufficiency that points dolefully towards the inexpressible.

Pound, although a far more accomplished and self-aware poet than those cited above, was not immune to this trope. His 'Δώρῖα' in 'Des Imagistes' depicts a monochrome antiquity and the shadowy flowers of the underworld. The entire poem reads:

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.²⁷

This text celebrates an inhospitable and grey eternity against the transience of the present moment. The 'shadowy flowers' of the afterlife are compared to the 'gaiety' of the living world. The flowers are the vehicles of subjective emotion, and the primary means of communicating the contrast between the ephemeral present and eternity. And, again, flowers are aligned with a positive depiction of morbidity.

Pound's celebrated 'In a Station of the Metro' is less emotional about

the parallel it draws between faces in a city crowd and ‘petals on a wet black bough’. However, the pathos of urban anonymity seems to bind the city-dwellers to the starkly individuated petals. For Pound, as for his imagist peers, the trope of the lonely flower allowed him to communicate insufficiency in a way that was co-extensive with the imagist drive towards formal reduction.

In his discussion of ‘In a Station of the Metro’ in the 1914 ‘Vorticism’ essay, Pound praises the brevity of oriental models (there is little point in separating faux-Japanese from faux-Chinese at this stage in Pound’s career).²⁸ He then cites a version of the butterfly poem that Flint had translated from Couchoud’s French six years earlier in the *New Age* article discussed above. Pound praises the excision of metaphor from the haiku, and he discusses the ‘super-position of one idea set on top of another’. The genesis of ‘In a Station of the Metro’, he writes, was a long process of condensation: it was a thirty-line poem, then a poem ‘half that length’, and finally, a year later, the much anthologised ‘hokku-like sentence’. Pound is willing to allow that the poem might be ‘meaningless’, but the poet is ‘trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective’. Importantly, this immediacy – this ‘thing’ – can never be fully captured in the verbal utterance, as it is the movement of thought itself.²⁹

Imagism communicates the fleeting perceptual gestalt – a moment whose subsequent poetic reconstruction, recollected, as it were, in tranquillity, is quietly suppressed. The orientalised ‘instant’ is celebrated in more conventionally literary fashion in Flint’s brief ‘History of Imagism’, published in the *Egoist* in May 1915. Flint praises Edward Storer for ‘a form of expression, like the Japanese, in which an image is the resonant heart of an exquisite moment’. He remarks that before Pound had even made his entry into proto-imagist conversations, Flint, Hulme and other members of the Poets’ Club had become disillusioned with ‘English poetry as it was’ and ‘proposed at various times to replace it by pure *vers libre*’ and by ‘the Japanese tanka and haikai’. Pound’s angry response contrasts the ‘Hellenic hardness’ of the female poet H.D. with the feminised softness (‘custard’) of Edward Storer.³⁰ Yet, while Pound, as we have seen, had sought to expel an excess that was coded as feminine from poetry, in fact such ‘slither’ is distinctly male-voiced in the writing promoted by Pound.

In his versions from the Chinese, Pound was heavily dependent on earlier translations, especially Herbert Giles’s *History of Chinese Literature* (1901). Pound’s changes to Giles’s translations are instructive. His ‘Liu Ch’e’ reads as follows:

The rustling of the silk is discontinued,
 Dust drifts over the courtyard,
 There is no sound of footfall, and the leaves
 Scurry into heaps and lie still,
 And she the rejoicer of the heart is beneath them:

A wet leaf that clings to the threshold.³¹

This poem is an adaptation of a Chinese original, written about 150 BC. Giles's translation reads:

The sound of rustling silk is stilled,
 With dust the marble courtyard filled;
 No footfalls echo on the floor,
 Fallen leaves in heaps block up the door . . .
 For she, my pride, my lovely one, is lost,
 And I am left, in hopeless anguish tossed.

In the Giles version, metre and rhyme are insistent and they weigh heavily on the movement of the verse. Such ponderous translations came to seem redundant in light of the fluid verses of *Cathay*, even as scholars lamented errors in Pound's translation. This is a poem of regret and loss occasioned, according to Giles, by the death of 'a harem favourite',³² but Pound's version leaves the context unclear. In his poem, the lost lover is compared, with no further explanation, to the wet leaf at the threshold. Pound uses near-identical means to Flint to evoke the pathos, with the leaf (recalling Couchoud's lonely flower) offered as an emblem of sorrow, yearning and unachievable fulfilment.³³

While Pound's heavily mediated translations from the Chinese did open new possibilities in the form and address of anglophone poetry, he was nonetheless susceptible in this writing to an aestheticised insufficiency that was embedded in the late Romantic and symbolist models he sought to reject. The subjective emotion of the Giles translation is replaced by the expressive wet leaf, yet this attempt to make a natural object bear the emotional freight of the poem is compromised by the peculiar cluster of negative affects that it is meant to represent. On this occasion, a poignant regret attaches to the loss of a particular source of pleasure. The pathos that stems from the super-position of lost lover and wet leaf is acutely gendered: it is a figure of bereft masculinity. The emotional force of the image depends on non-statement rather than the vaunted direct statement of imagist theory.

In more radical vein, Pound reduced Giles's ten-line version of a poem by the celebrated Lady Pan to a mere three lines.³⁴ Giles notes that the occasion of the poem was the Emperor's replacement of Lady Pan, long

his ‘chief favourite’, with ‘a younger and more beautiful rival’. Lady Pan, a favourite of the Emperor, evidently inscribed the poem on a fan which she gave him when he replaced her. Giles observes that ‘the phrase “autumn fan” has long since passed into the language, and is used figuratively of a deserted wife’. So, once again, faced with an enormous range of potential source material, Pound chooses to use the tools of concision to communicate the pathos of abandonment. Here is Giles’s original:

O fair white silk, fresh from the weaver’s loom,
 Clear as the frost, bright as the winter snow —
 See! friendship fashions out of thee a fan,
 Round as the round moon shines in heaven above,
 At home, abroad, a close companion thou,
 Stirring at every move the grateful gale.
 And yet I fear, ah me! that autumn chills,
 Cooling the dying summer’s torrid rage,
 Will see thee laid neglected on the shelf,
 All thought of bygone days, like them bygone.

Pound’s version, ‘Fan-Piece for Her Imperial Lord’, which he published in *Des Imagistes*, goes as follows:

O fan of white silk,
 clear as frost on the grass-blade,
 You also are laid aside.³⁵

The Giles translation compares the fan to frost, snow and the moon: three natural images of coolness and pallor. Pound’s version of the poem retains only one comparison, sharpening this to focus on a close-up of a single grass blade. The parallelism of the discarded fan and the lover, implicit in the Giles translation, is made explicit in Pound’s version with the word ‘also’. As with ‘Liu Ch’e’, the emotion of the narrator is projected on to an object described with conspicuous economy. The pathos of loss persists in both poems, and it depends for its effect on half-statement. There is, in both, an assimilation of short lines and various affects of incompleteness. The lonely, languid, suffering, male sensibility of post-symbolist anglophone verse, readily discernible in numerous early imagist poems, is conveyed in verse that expresses the wound of separation through severe concision. (Even though the original text was written by a woman, it is ventriloquised by the poetic idioms of the male translators.) Truncation is the non-discursive enactment of loss, a means of communicating the narcissistic contemplation of wounds. Imagist claims to directness are tenuous indeed in Pound’s translations from translations, in which effects of immediacy are sought in writing that is

doubly (or even triply in the case of some of the Fenellosa derivations) removed from the original.

Almost all of the poems of Pound's *Cathay* express some quality of negative feeling: sorrow at parting, exile, abandonment or displacement. 'Lament of the Frontier Guard' expresses sadness at the futility of war; 'The River Merchant's Wife: a Letter', one of several epistolary poems, is addressed to an absent husband; 'The Beautiful Toilet' describes a courtesan neglected by a drunken husband; and 'The Jewel Stairs' Grievance' speaks of a neglected courtesan in words arrived at, according to Pound, after a 'mathematical process of reduction'.³⁶ Pound may have expunged emotional 'slither' from his poems, but it is certainly made present through evocation, and concision is the method through which such negative emotion is evoked.

For Pound, via Bunting, 'Dichten=condensare'. Poetry is 'the most concentrated form of verbal expression'.³⁷ Condensation and concentration are integral to Pound's early poetics. Yet Poundian insufficiency implies a kind of plenitude-to-come. As well as the stripping away of the merely decorative, Pound recommends a form of writing that is 'charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree'.³⁸ This notion of compression, then, implies not Hulme's 'dry' neoclassical vacuum, but quite the opposite: a potential for repleteness that verges on the explosive. In this highly overdetermined model, the condensed poem must communicate a great deal more than its brevity would suggest. Pound's poetry of this period is more formally inventive and self-aware than that of most of the poets he drew into the orbit of 'imagisme'. Yet even his writing remained indebted to intertwined tropes of melancholic inexpressibility and pathos that had their roots in the appropriation of French and oriental models.

As he moved away from Imagism, Pound was already leaving behind the idea of the short poem. 'I am often asked whether there can be a long imagiste or vorticist poem', he remarks chattily in a note at the end of his 'Vorticism' article. 'The Japanese, who evolved the hokku, evolved also the Noh plays. In the best "Noh" the whole play may consist of one image. I mean it is gathered about one image. The unity consists in one image, enforced by movement and music. I see nothing against a long vorticist poem.'³⁹

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The 1915 imagist-themed special issue of the *Egoist* that contains Flint's disputed 'History of Imagism' also contains a review article he wrote about the poetry of H.D. In this piece, he expresses certain reservations about H.D., suggesting that her writing 'owes nothing to common

speech⁴⁰ and remarking on her 'loneliness' as a poet committed only to 'what has come to her direct'. Needless to say, this disregards H.D.'s erudition. However, more salient for present purposes is the figure of loneliness, which is held to represent a disavowal of the tacit contract between writer and reader. He considers that her 'ceaseless scrutiny of word and phrase' are a great 'danger' to the comprehensibility of her writing:

For in the creation of beauty and the simultaneous criticism of what is created, you can cut too far and produce angularity, or too curiously and produce enigma, which was the fate of Mallarmé. In all art, it seems to me, there must be generosity and some pity for the spectator; and you may fall short of generosity by withholding in order that the gift may be finer. The riddle the artist has always to answer is, How much shall he give; and the quality of his pity for the spectator will decide this. An artist cannot be inhuman and be understood. I say this because I think I have detected in one or two of H.D.'s later poems a tendency to pare and cut too far, with a consequent slight feeling, in the result, of bareness and jejuneness. But it is only slight; and there is more danger of her becoming inhuman, in the sense I have indicated.⁴¹

Flint correctly identifies the impulse to purge the imagist poem of psychologised speaker and addressee, and he is right to notice the scrupulous self-awareness of H.D.'s writing. However, in aligning his own sensibility with generosity and pity, in contradistinction to the lonely 'inhumanity' of her project, he fails to understand the communicative energies that might be unleashed by the impulse to 'pare and cut'. Indeed, the formal features that he isolates for criticism are, for many readers, the greatest strengths of H.D.'s early writing. What if the poem, rather than being 'understood' on Flint's terms, asks the reader for new forms of understanding?

The 'paring and cutting' that troubles Flint is comparable in phrasing to H.D.'s description of Pound's interventionist editing of her early poetic versions of fragments from the *Greek Anthology* – the creation myth of modernist poetry. In H.D.'s words, Pound 'scratched "H.D. Imagiste"', in London, in the British Museum tea room, at the bottom of a typed sheet, now slashed with his creative pencil, "Cut this out, shorten this line"⁴² In another account, H.D. writes that 'Hermes of the Ways' was 'a rough transcription of a short poem from the Greek Anthology', which Pound 'pruned . . . into vers libre' . . . 'It was one of those early poems that Ezra scrutinized and with a flourish of a large lead pencil, in the British Museum tea-room, deleted and trimmed or pruned or chiselled into the then unfamiliar free-verse.'⁴³

Pound's paring and cutting was, according to H.D., crucial to her

earliest published poetry, which was written at a time when she and Aldington saw Pound almost every day.⁴⁴ Yet her account of Pound's pruning understates her own role in formulating a distinctive poetics. All of the verbs used to describe his role involve cutting text, but, unlike Pound's versions from the Chinese, 'Hermes of the Ways' is an *expansion*, not a contraction, of the fragment entitled, in the *Greek Anthology*, 'The Orchard Corner' by the female poet Anyte. H.D.'s poem is considerably longer than the editor Mackail's translation from the original:

I, Hermes, stand here by the windy orchard in the cross-ways nigh the grey sea-shore, giving rest on the way to wearied men; and the fountain wells forth cold stainless water.⁴⁵

Perhaps what Pound 'trimmed' into 'Hermes of the Ways' was a relatively long-lined poem based on the fragment from Anyte. Or perhaps his intervention was less substantial than H.D., for reasons of her own, gives him credit for. Or perhaps accentuating the poem's 'free verse' qualities was Pound's chief role. Unlike *The Waste Land* manuscript, the evidence for the collaboration is not available. Whatever happened in that storied tea-room, the enigmatic and fragmentary quality of 'Hermes of the Ways' was achieved through a process of both expansion and contraction. The tiny prose fragment, translated into late nineteenth-century literary prose, is transformed again into a poetic text, and then again, through cutting, into the short, spare lines of the published work. H.D.'s poem inserts an almost featureless speaker who refers to Hermes in both the second- and third-person voices. The original, written in the third-century BC in the genre of the inscription, refers to a crossing point marked with a stone monument (not the messenger god of later Greek mythology). 'Hermes of the Ways' develops this image to make the monument a resilient and enduring feature of a harsh coastal environment in which the trees and fruit endure the battering of the wind. The poem, in other words, is entirely consistent with the poems on similar themes that H.D. would write in the years to come. It is likely, therefore, that while Pound made formal adjustments, the rigour and austerity of the poem's vision was entirely H.D.'s, and that Pound's brief but significant contribution was to help H.D. develop the short-lined free-verse aesthetic that would best communicate the themes of attenuation, resistance and violence that preoccupied her. However, while the impression of 'paring and cutting' is certainly a core feature of H.D.'s verse of this period, it is notably free of the pathos of insufficiency that I discuss above.

Pound, aided by his ignorance of the languages he translated,

absorbed and propagated distinctly warped appropriations of Chinese and Japanese texts. H.D.'s source material was similarly inaccessible to the Western reader: the obscure and fragmentary writings of pre-Homeric Greece. On the face of it, H.D.'s poetry might appear to satisfy Hulme's call for a neoclassical return to austerity after the perceived excesses of late romanticism. But, as Carr points out, there is a strong likelihood that Jane Harrison's polemical *The Religion of the Ancient Greeks* shaped H.D.'s version of Greece: 'it is no longer the Victorians' masculine citadel of Homeric heroes or Athenian repose but an earlier, more elemental place where the struggles of the female psyche can be played out'.⁴⁶ Instead of an emergent demos, myth as social scaffolding and a heaven populated by a huge cast of demiurges, she was addressing a murky and irrecoverable world that was as foreign to anglophone poetry readers – even those with a familiarity with the Classics – as ancient Chinese.

Pound enthused about H.D.'s writing in the famous covering letter he sent with H.D.'s poems to the editor of *Poetry*, Harriet Monroe: 'Objective – no slither; direct – no excessive use of adjectives, no metaphors that won't permit examination. It's straight talk, straight as the Greek!'⁴⁷ However, while Pound's rhetoric is, as so often, forceful, it is by no means clear that H.D. shared either Pound's or Flint's reverence for directness. She would certainly come to question the term, and her later poetry is anything but direct. In a December 1916 review in the *Egoist* of John Gould Fletcher's *Goblins and Pagodas*, she writes: 'In the second section of his book, Mr. Fletcher deals with a more difficult and, when successfully handled, richer form of art: not that of direct presentation, but that of suggestion.' Taking up Fletcher's preface, in which he discusses the decoration of a Greek vase as a model for artistic creation, she continues:

the images so wrought upon the body of the vase – the maenad, poised for ever, quietly for all the swirl of draperies and of loosened head-band, or the satyr for ever lifting his vine-wreathed cup – are satisfying and indeed perfect. But how much more for the lover of beauty is the wine within the great jar beautiful – how much more than the direct image to him are the images suggested by shadow and light, the flicker of the purple wine, the glint across the yellow, the depth of the crimson and red? Who would stand gazing at a satyr and a maenad, however adroit the composition of fluttering garment and poised wine-cup when the wine itself within the great jar stands waiting for him?⁴⁸

By using such phrases as 'direct presentation' and 'the direct image' H.D. appears, following the publication of her first single-author volume earlier that year, to be marking her distance from the imagist aesthetic

with which she had so strongly been identified (and which had been restated in Aldington's preface to the 1915 anthology *Some Imagist Poets*).⁴⁹ While she would in later years move towards a distinctly vatic mode of writing, I do not believe that there was an abrupt stylistic volte-face in 1916. Despite the manifesto-like statements that surrounded the early poems' emergence, the wilful inscrutability of H.D.'s writing is at least a salient feature as its directness. The technique of cutting in the writing of H.D., which is everywhere marked by formal incompleteness, is integral to its effects. As I have argued, many of the poets associated with Imagism remained committed to a pathos of insufficiency: figures of loneliness, abandonment and exile. The formal parsimony of much imagist writing generates an atmosphere in which understatement is heavily emphasised, inviting the supposition that it is pregnant with unstated meaning. The cut of the linebreak often communicates the wounded sensibility of the male speakers of these poems. Even the poems Pound chose for his *Cathay* volume have, as we have seen, loss, exile and suffering in common – and some convey the male reader's pitying (to use Flint's term) contemplation of the deserted female, who like the solitary flower, is beautiful in her destitution. Imagist poetry typically communicates in a diffusely mournful register, notwithstanding the calls for directness, clarity and objectivity.

H.D.'s early poetry embodies such qualities more consistently, inaugurating a new relationship between form and emotion in anglophone verse. There is no plangent, narcissistic contemplation of a wound (cf. Aldington's 'Beauty Thou Hast Hurt Me Overmuch'); no projection of human feeling on to an isolated and fragile natural object ('The petals fall in the fountain,/ the orange coloured rose-leaves,/ Their ochre clings to the stone' (Pound));⁵⁰ and no celebration of unachieved relation as a mourning-motor for the poem (cf. Flint's 'Dear one!/ you sit there/ in the corner of the carriage;/ and you do not know me and your eyes forbid'). These poems, which communicate in what Denise Riley describes as 'spiky girlish hellenics',⁵¹ allow effects of formal attenuation to enact resilience, not fragility. The contemporary moment is energised through contact with a distant historical other, and a long, supervening tradition of poetic self-expression is set to one side. An example of this poetic mode is 'Sea Rose', which appears in *Some Imagist Poets, 1915* and which is the opening poem of *Sea Garden*:

Rose, harsh rose
 marred and with stint of petals,
 meagre flower, thin,
 sparse of leaf,

more precious
 than a wet rose,
 single on a stem —
 you are caught in the drift.

Stunted, with small leaf,
 you are flung on the sand,
 you are lifted
 in the crisp sand
 that drives in the wind.

Can the spice-rose
 drip such acrid fragrance
 hardened in a leaf?⁵²

The sea rose stands at a great distance from the wet petals, damp leaves and solitary blooms that populate the writing of H.D.'s male imagist peers. Although the poem adapts one of the oldest and most worn-out items in the poet's symbolic repertoire – the rose – it immediately takes issue with convention: 'harsh rose'.⁵³ Effects of compression are integral to the power of the poem. The adjectives to that are applied to the rose – 'meagre', 'thin', 'sparse' – are readily discernible in the form of the text. Yet these qualities, all typically pejorative terms, are here advantages. While the rose is 'caught' by the sea, 'flung' by sand and 'lifted' by wind, it survives and the message of its scent is powerful and singular. *Sea Garden* is a book of borderlands, outlining a seaside environment in which plant-life is hardened to hostile conditions. The rose in 'Sea Rose' is sturdy and enduring. It is compared favourably to the rose of an inland garden, which might correspond to the rose of more 'cultivated' verse convention. The sea rose, battered by circumstances and blown along a vast beach, emits a bitter and concentrated fragrance that is altogether more pungent than the convention of sweet scent would allow. H.D. invents a hardy category of plant: its solitude is a source of strength, not poignant fragility. While one might read the sea rose as an emblem of bruised but triumphant femininity, or as a record of the rigours of H.D.'s own self-actualisation as a poet, my belief is that this writing, while crucially inflected by female experience, is also the record of the emergence of a hard-edged and distinct mode of poetic thought, formed in the teeth of an often quite explicitly gendered form of adversity.

The attenuated form of this writing is not – or not merely – a token of triumph over difficult conditions. The compression and the cutting of the writing are its strengths. These are the conditions of an expressive mode that does not draw on incompleteness either as an index of what has been lost, or as a gesture towards an metaphysical and extralinguistic fullness. This writing identifies curtailment as a self-sufficient (not insufficient)

medium for cognitive experience. This experience is categorically distinct from what can be communicated by the uninterrupted line. H.D.'s sea wind scours the marine landscape mercilessly, revealing forms that are clear and singular. The poetic representation of this wind is entirely lacking the aestheticised masochism of Aldington's: 'Toothed wind of the seas,/ No man knows thy beginning./ As a bird with strong claws/ Thou woundest me,/ O beautiful sorrow.' The sensibility that animates H.D.'s writing survives the tooth and claw of the natural world, emerging with speech that is marked by the elements but which endures.

The flower poems of *Sea Garden* – 'Sea Rose', but also 'Sea Violet', 'Sea Lily' and 'Sea Poppies' – seem almost programmatically to use flowers to take issue with the pathos of insufficiency in the writing of her peers. The hardened leaf of 'Sea Rose' is very different indeed to the deserted peony or fallen petal of Flint's influential 1908 review; it is distinct, again, from the wet petals of 'In a Station of the Metro' or the 'wet leaf' of 'Liu Ch'e', or the wet petals (again) of 'Ts'ai Chi'h'. As Cynthia Pondrom argues, H.D.'s writing is not merely the example of imagist poetry that best bears out the precepts outlined by Pound, Hulme and Flint, it is the practice that made the theory possible: 'The Imagist poems of H.D. stand in sharp contrast to these early [imagist] poems of Pound and Aldington in clarity, sharpness, precision, objectivity, and the use of a presentational rather than a discursive style.'⁵⁴

Throughout *Sea Garden*, H.D. marks her distance from the pathos of neglect and separation. The atmosphere of *Sea Garden* is not, whatever Flint argues, inhuman. There are minimal indications of human culture in a garden and shipping. H.D. invokes, like countless poetic forerunners, a pre-industrial past but she does not succumb to the lure of benign pastoral. Recurring motifs are flowers, trees, sea, sand, wind, heat, rocks, gods, honey and salt. The principal human figure is the speaker, although others are occasionally invoked. This speaker is resilient in poem after poem. Even the speaker of 'Loss', written for a drowned lover, professes gladness at the bereavement, because the gods have called the lover back. In writing by her male peers, the truncated presentation of such images might trigger a soul-stirring gesture in which feelings of pain and vulnerability are given a positive or even redemptive aesthetic gloss. Truncation in H.D., though, is comparable to the 'thin', 'sparse of leaf' rose: it is wiry and resilient, an attribute of strength. Rachel Blau Du Plessis argues that:

These flowers of the sea gardens are of a harsh surprising beauty, slashed, torn, dashed yet still triumphant and powerful, despite being wounded, hardened, tested by exposure. These flowers propose an almost contemptuous

defiance of ease, of simple fashions of ripening. H.D. constructs flowers admired in ways and for motives far different from the view of lush ripeness in *carpe diem* roses.⁵⁵

I would go beyond this remark to suggest that the ‘slashed, torn’ qualities of the writing are an endorsement of the communicative potential of an aesthetic grounded in cutting back. The flowers are emblems of formal as well as metaphorical power. Pound, in H.D.’s own words, ‘slashed’ her manuscript to help launch her as a poet, but she does something distinctive and original by insisting on the sturdiness and self-sufficiency of the short-form poem. Indeed, H.D.’s early writing is significant for the ways in which a harsh editing is imaged. The word ‘slashed’ occurs twice in ‘Sea Lily’, and the occurrence is significant:

Reed,
slashed and torn
but doubly rich —

And:

Yet though the whole wind
slash at your bark,
you are lifted up⁵⁶

It is hard not to read both the reed and the bark as references to writing. A certain editorial violence is the creative energy that leads to the ‘new beauty’ in ‘some terrible wind-tortured place’. No longer outsourced to Pound, editorial intervention happens in the course of writing. The austere, abrasive qualities of the poetry are evidence of a battered text. However, the foreshortening of the line and the abstention from the rhetorical resources of conventional literary language lead away from a poetics of loss, abandonment and exile. In most imagist writing, innovations in *vers libre* were accompanied with a sensibility that paraded its injuries, finding in them some guarantee of artistic credibility. In H.D.’s early writing, more than in *Cathay*, and more than in the work of the other imagists, the cuts made to the text in the pursuit of concision are presented not as a wound, but as a generative opacity. H.D.’s conspicuously damaged text is sufficient to itself, however oblique and truncated. The slashing and cutting of which it speaks does not point towards restitution, only towards communicating new forms of beauty.

Her repertoire of condensing gestures is broad. Repetition, acoustic echo, and abrupt line and stanza breaks all play a part. Similar effects are discernible in all of the poems to sea species invented by H.D.: ‘Sea Violet’, ‘Sea Lily’, ‘Sea Iris’ and ‘Sea Poppies’. In ‘Sea Lily’, the entire

poem is a testament to the endurance of physical assault and, again, the flower is hard: 'sand cuts your petal,/ furrows it with hard edge,/ like flint/ on a bright stone'. In 'Sea Iris', a 'brittle flower' is 'scented and stinging,/ rigid myrrh-bud, camphor-flower, /sweet and salt'. In 'Storm', the motif of the single leaf appears, only without the forlorn connotations we have encountered elsewhere in this chapter. The inhuman addressee of this poem is a violent storm, which batters the trees:

you have broken off a weighted leaf
in the wind,
it is hurled out,
whirls up and sinks,
a green stone.⁵⁷

This 'weighted leaf' has substance that causes it to sink. But the 'green stone' simply vanishes from the reader's contemplation. It is not offered as the token of evanescence or as the conduit to Symons's 'free breath of the spirit'. Wind is again an emblem of strength in 'The Sheltered Garden', in which the speaker betrays increasing frustration with the bland pink flowers of a cultivated garden, which represent 'beauty without strength'. In the remarkable conclusion to this poem H.D.'s speaker feels the violence of the elements:

I want wind to break,
scatter these pink-stalks,
snap off their spiced heads,
fling them about with dead leaves —
spread the paths with twigs,
limbs broken off,
trail great pine branches,
hurled from some far wood
right across the melon-patch,
break pear and quince —
leave half-trees, torn, twisted
but showing the fight was valiant.

O to blot out this garden
to forget, to find a new beauty
in some terrible
wind-tortured place.⁵⁸

This is an iconoclastic credo of almost Futurist intensity. H.D.'s poetry of this period is far clearer in its desire to destroy than anything written by Pound, even in his Vorticist period. If the garden becomes a scene of devastation, H.D.'s chosen alternative is far from comfortable. The 'wind-tortured place' might well be within the pages of *Sea Garden*, through which blow a succession of harsh winds, continuations of the

scouring wind that 'whips round my ankles' in H.D.'s breakthrough work, 'Hermes of the Ways'. Now the wind is asked to 'rend open the heat, / cut apart the heat, rend it to tatters'.⁵⁹ Beauty lies in incompleteness, emerging from the embrace of violent change.

I do not wish to argue that the history of the short-form line in modernist poetry is essentially H.D.'s: her work was, after all, not always easy of access, and Pound is clearly of greater significance to most of the poets I discuss. Many critics, since May Sinclair's 1927 identification of H.D. as the 'perfect Imagist', have observed that her early work is the best example of Imagism in practice.⁶⁰ My claim, rather, concerns short form: H.D.'s writing better exemplifies the impulse towards *condensare* in Pound's thought than his own poetry. The consequences of concision have been consistently overlooked in discussion of Imagism in favour of the discussion of directness, objectivity and the image qua image. But there is no reason to conclude that either directness or objectivity lend themselves to short-form poems, or that an image might better be communicated with short lines.

While imagist poems are typically brief and short-lined, that quality of curtailment is, in most cases, bound up with a wounded sensibility. In work that is far from 'objective', the emotional consequences of loss, separation, and absence are of paramount importance. Sometimes, this triumphantly wounded mental state is a mere cliché fed by Decadent or post-symbolist posturing: it is more or less undiluted 'slither'. In other cases, as with the poems of Pound's *Cathay*, the writing may communicate across generic and cultural boundaries in rich and complex ways, while still committed to a poetics that invests incompleteness with a positive aesthetic value.

Mallarmé wrote that '*Nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trois-quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est faite du bonheur de deviner peu & peu; le suggérer, voilà le rêve*' [to name an object is to lose three-quarters of the poem's joy, which comes from the pleasure of guessing little by little; to suggest, that is the dream].⁶¹ Too many imagists were afflicted by the desire to suggest mystery by means of compression. Such elegant short lines allowed the 'thing' to be 'half-said' and thus to open on to inexpressible immensities. Pound's fine poem 'The Return', based on the relatively little-known 'Médailles d'Argile' by the symbolist forebear Reignier, is a case in point: brief, elliptical and steeped in the mystery of returning divinities.⁶² Even H.D.'s writing, for all its terse embrace of the hardy, weathered and resilient flora of coastal regions, sought the mysterious resonance of inaccessible pre-Homeric deities. However, H.D.'s poems of this period have a countervailing anti-metaphysical edge, removing the poem far from any historical or cultural moment

recoverable by H.D. or her contemporaries, and opening up the possibility of a wild, violent and uncultivated form of beauty. This openness to abandon, which is the antithesis of the poised neoclassicism of Hulme's 'small dry things', is clearly at odds with the severe restraint of the lines. The resulting conflict, between austerity and violence, is the source of the poems' mould-breaking energy.

Imagist theory was a nexus of thought from remarkably different times and places. In the best such work, collage, interruption and incompleteness served to communicate the withdrawal from rhetorical excess. In this way such poems act as a gesture of refusal in the face of a literary culture burdened with ideologies that could not outlast the First World War. The primary impulse behind Pound's desire for directness was to demystify. However, such directness proved a chimera, particularly when the 'charging' of poetic language through condensation militated so effectively against directness. The function of compression in the ensuing tradition is not – as in the earliest imagist work – to suggest lagoons of mournful affect. It is to ask language to contemplate its own self-sufficient unfolding.

Notes

1. Pound, 'A Retrospect', *Literary Essays*, p. 11.
2. Pound, 'Date Line', *Literary Essays*, p. 77.
3. Pound, 'A Retrospect', p. 12.
4. Hulme, 'Lecture on Modern Poetry', *Selected Writings*, p. 66.
5. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism', *Selected Writings*, p. 78. At the end of this essay Hulme distinguishes between ineffability and the unrepresentable: 'The intellect always analyses – when there is a synthesis it is baffled. That is why the artist's work seems mysterious. The intellect can't represent it. This is a necessary consequence of the particular nature of the intellect and the purposes for which it is formed. It doesn't mean that your synthesis is ineffable, simply that it can't be definitely stated' (p. 82).
6. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism', p. 75, p. 78.
7. Hulme, 'Romanticism and Classicism', p. 80 (my emphasis).
8. Hulme 'Lecture on Modern Poetry', p. 63. Helen Carr argues in *The Verse Revolutionaries* that Hulme 'was very taken by [Remy] de Gourmont's argument (a development of Nietzsche's view of language) that poetry introduced fresh and vital metaphors into the language, which would eventually pass as dead metaphors, or in Hulme's terms, "counters", into prose' (p. 161).
9. Pound, 'A Retrospect', p. 7, p. 12. Whether or not by design, Pound's phrasing echoes the apparent argument in George Herbert's 'Jordan (I)': 'May no lines pass, except they do their duty/ Not to a true, but painted chair?'
10. Richard Sieburth, 'In Pound we Trust', pp. 148–9. For Sieburth, there is

- a lurking misogyny to Pound's language at such moments. This prefigures both his economic theory and his anti-semitism: 'The phallic metaphors that dominate Pound's imagist and Vorticist polemics clearly designate the Other or the excess that needs to be vigorously eliminated from contemporary art as somehow feminine or excremental – soft, slushy, slithery, ambiguous, indefinite, internal' (p. 149).
11. Sieburth, 'In Pound we Trust', pp. 149–50.
 12. Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image*, p. 157. Kermode argues that Hulme is not even successful in his adaptation of French models: 'the Hulmian Image – precise, orderly, anti-discursive, the product of intuition – is the Symbol of the French poets given a new philosophical suit . . . once it is granted that Hulme was trying to do much the same thing as Mallarmé, it becomes evident that he did not do it very well' (p. 154).
 13. Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, pp. 130–1.
 14. Pound's imagist period comes after he had moved on, with Ford Madox Ford's help, from an early style memorably characterised by Hugh Kenner as 'Rosettian tosh' (*The Pound Era*, p. 92).
 15. Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 223.
 16. Cyrena Pondrom notes that in an angry letter of July 1915, in which Pound disputed the origins of Imagism with Flint, the American poet cited the difference between the two swan poems as exemplary of Imagism's innovations ('Selected Letters From H.D. to F. S. Flint', p. 563).
 17. Flint, *In the Net of Stars*, pp. 21–3, p. 21.
 18. Pound (ed.), *Des Imagistes*, p. 35. Flint, according to Pondrom, was not persuaded that this was the better poem (Pondrom (ed.), 'Selected Letters from H.D. to F. S. Flint', p. 563).
 19. This environment is sketched in Carr, *The Verse Revolutionaries*, pp. 190–2.
 20. Flint, 'Recent Verse', *New Age*, 11 July 1908, pp. 212–13.
 21. Couchoud, as translated by Carr, *The Verse Revolutionaries*, p. 172.
 22. Carr observes: 'Hulme had the theory; Flint had found the form. The haiku's qualities of simplicity, brevity, fusion and instantaneous impact were all to be central to later Imagism' (p. 172).
 23. As translated by Flint ('Recent Verse', p. 212).
 24. Richard Aldington, in Pound (ed.), *Des Imagistes*, p. 16.
 25. Aldington, in Pound (ed.), *Des Imagistes*, p. 9.
 26. Flint, in Pound (ed.), *Des Imagistes*, p. 34.
 27. Pound, in Pound (ed.), *Des Imagistes*, p. 41.
 28. In 'Vorticism', in *A Memoir of Gaudier-Brzeska*, pp. 81–94. Pound is notably casual about national distinctions: 'The Japanese have had the sense of exploration. They have understood the beauty of this sort of knowing. A Chinaman said long ago that if a man can't say what he has to say in twelve lines he had better keep quiet. The Japanese have evolved the still shorter form of the hokku' (p. 88).
 29. Pound, 'Vorticism', p. 89.
 30. Cited in Helen Carr, *The Verse Revolutionaries*, p. 766.
 31. Pound in Pound (ed.), *Des Imagistes*, p. 44.
 32. Herbert Giles, *A History of Chinese Literature*, p. 100.
 33. In his book *Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem*, Robert Kern describes how Pound uses wilfully awkward phrases such as 'she the

- rejoicer of the heart is beneath them'. In so doing, he argues, Pound 'invents Chinese for the English reader, in part, by defamiliarizing his English' (p. 186). Zhaoming Qian, in *Pound and China*, notes the ways in which Pound 'foreignises' his translations more than other translators, including Giles: the bowing of heads over clasped hands in 'Taking Leave of a Friend', for example, is a Poundian invention that depends on received ideas of Chinese behaviour (p. 36). In *Cathay: Ezra Pound's Orient*, Ira Nadel finds that Pound's experimentalism survives the orientalist clichés: 'The basic tension in the collection is, in fact, that between the world imagined by the conventional term "Cathay" and the originality of Pound's English text' (p. 55). Ming Xie's *Ezra Pound and the Appropriation of Chinese Poetry: Cathay, Translation, and Imagism* contains thoroughgoing discussion of Pound's orientalism.
34. The poem is found a page further into Giles's *History* than the source for 'Liu Ch'e'.
 35. Pound (ed.), *Des Imagistes*, p. 45.
 36. Pound, *Early Writings*, p. 298.
 37. Pound, *ABC of Reading*, p. 30.
 38. Pound, *ABC of Reading*, p. 30.
 39. Pound, 'Vorticism', p. 109.
 40. Flint, 'The Poetry of H.D.', *The Egoist*, 1 May 1915, p. 73. Flint is alluding to the preface to *Some Imagist Poets*, 1915, primarily authored by Aldington, which makes the use of 'the language of common speech' the first precept uniting the imagists. His appraisal of H.D. is more nuanced and generous than that of Harold Monro in another article in the issue: 'It is petty poetry; it is minutely small: it seems intended to be . . . Such reticence denotes either poverty of imagination or needlessly excessive restraint' (p. 79).
 41. Flint, 'The Poetry of H.D.', p. 73.
 42. H.D., *End to Torment: A Memoir of Ezra Pound*, p. 18.
 43. H.D. papers, cited in Carr, *The Verse Revolutionaries*, p. 491.
 44. Carr, *The Verse Revolutionaries*, p. 424.
 45. Mackail, J. W. (ed.), *Selected Epigrams from the Greek Anthology*, p. 207.
 46. Carr, *The Verse Revolutionaries*, p. 495.
 47. Pound, *Selected Letters*, p. 11.
 48. H.D. 'Goblins and Pagodas', p. 183.
 49. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, in *H.D.: The Career of that Struggle*, argues that H.D.'s 1920s prose works were a means of rebelling against her "'canonisation" as Imagist saint (miracle worker and icon)' (p. 31). In a 1929 letter to his estranged wife, Aldington wrote 'Ezra may have "invented" Imagism but, after all, you wrote the poems' (cited in Diana Collecott, *H.D. and Sapphic Modernism*, p. 136).
 50. Aldington and Pound, in Pound (ed.), *Des Imagistes*, p. 13, p. 46; Flint in Aldington and H.D. (eds), *Some Imagist Poets*, p. 58.
 51. Denise Riley, *The Words of Selves*, p. 96.
 52. H.D., *Collected Poems*, p. 5.
 53. Comparably nonconformist modernist roses can be found in Pound's 'a rose in the steel dust', from Canto 74; Williams's 'obsolete rose' in *Spring and All*; and Stein's famous 'a rose is a rose is a rose'.

54. Cyrena Pondrom, 'H.D. and the Origins of Imagism', p. 93.
55. Rachel Blau DuPlessis. *H.D.: The Career of That Struggle*, pp. 12–13.
56. H.D., *Collected Poems*, p. 14.
57. H.D., *Collected Poems*, p. 36.
58. H.D., *Collected Poems*, p. 21.
59. H.D., *Collected Poems*, p. 25.
60. May Sinclair, cited in Collecott, *H.D. and Sapphic Modernism*, p. 135. For many of H.D.'s admirers in the years since the revival of her reputation – Robert Duncan, Collecott, Peter O'Leary, Blau DuPlessis – the later work is of greater interest than that of the brief imagist period.
61. Translation mine. Mallarmé cited in Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism*, p. 6.
62. Barbara Guest, in her H.D. biography, *Herself Defined*, speculates that 'The Return' gave H.D. the impetus to develop her early style (p. 45).