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Chapter 2: Imagisms

How were textual images conceived at the turn of the century? What properties did they possess, measurable or unmeasurable? In the famous preface to his 1897 novella *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Joseph Conrad announces that his project is, "by the power of the written word," "to make you hear, to make you feel, ... before all, to make you *see*. That—and no more, and it is everything." I will argue that he means "seeing" literally: not merely in the metaphorical sense of seeing as understanding, but in the physiological sense, of seeing as a neuro-ocular process. Conrad explains that his task is to hold up, "before all eyes," a "passing phase of life ... to show its vibration, its colour, its form, and through its movement, its form, and its colour, reveal the substance of its truth" (Conrad 49). This trinity—color, form, and vibration/movement—is so important to Conrad, or so conceptually slippery, that he allows it two iterations, even in an essay that stresses the importance of verbal economy. It is tempting to read these three words figuratively, to say that "colour," when describing "a passing phase of life" refers to an affective experience, rather than a hue, and that "form" refers to a conceptual structure, rather than the visual boundaries of physical objects. That would not be wrong. In fact, these, and more esoteric readings, are among the most typical.[1] But they overlook an equally valuable surface reading: that color and form are physiologically distinguishable ocular categories, corresponding to the rods and cones of retinal photoreceptors, and that they depend on light (vibrations in the visible electromagnetic spectrum) and a temporal dimension along which their movements may be perceived.

[1]See, for example See Enns and Trower 71. Ludwig Schnauder calls this sequence a blend of "the terms and concepts of Impressionism with a Victorian insistence on the truthfulness and moral sincerity of fiction" (Schnauder 98).

The eye is more than just an adequate metaphor for the imagination of this period's writers. To understand modernism, one must first understand the image, along with its primary interface, and first image-processing neural apparatus, the eye. Images are most legible in the novels and poems of these writers, as I will show in the case-studies of chapters 4 and 5, but these creative works, like Conrad's *Narcissus*, are almost always accompanied with theoretical writings that frame, explicate, contextualize, and market them. In addition to introductions like the one above, this theory also appears alongside the literary works in their first contexts: "little magazines" that published mixtures poems, essays, criticism, chapters of novels, and reproductions of visual art.[2] The critical accompaniments in these journals are not supplementary, in the Derridean sense of *external to*, the literary works they discuss, but are part of them (Derrida and Butler 145). This is especially true of poems like *The Waste Land*, where after the first printing, the text has rarely been unadorned with Eliot's own footnotes, but is also true of a wide range of writing at this time.

This period of literary history is so strongly autoexegetic that the theories of these writers deserves close examination, even when that theory is not consistently practiced. There are frequent and often-cited contradictions between the theories of these poet-critics and their practice, and yet these theories support a way of understanding and manipulating visual language, which not only reveals the centrality of vision and the image, but which shows definite and measurable properties of those images, leading ultimately to an ocular taxonomy. A study of literary images of the turn of the century, then, first requires a look at these immediate contexts: the secondary literature written by the authors of the primary.

The critical writings that appear in these journals: reviews, letters to the edi-

[2] In Britain, these included *The Freewoman* (1911–13) and *The New Freewoman* (1913–14), *The Egoist* (1914–19), and *The English Review* (1908-1937). In the United States, influential journals included *The Little Review* (1914–29), *The Dial* (1880–29), and *Poetry* (1912–).

tor, essays, and more, provide the appearance of a complex network of discourse that surrounds the literature. Since that network is mostly comprised of a small coterie of recurring literary figures, some of them disguised with pseudonyms, and most of them friends, their publications in these public forums can at times feel staged. It has even been argued that the theoretical output of *imagisme*, the literary movement Ezra Pound furiously promoted in the early 1910s, was little more than a marketing tactic, or a constructed controversy. So it is with skepticism that we must proceed to study the many imagisms of this period: impressionism, symbolism, vorticism, and imagism itself, all of which, by nature of their visual preoccupations, I label as "imagisms." Instead of highlighting their differences, then, I would like to show their similarities: a common understanding of the image that transcends movements and manifestos.

The most vivid theory of image in literature is found in I.A. Richards, a literary critic of this period who was influential to the school of "new critics." In his *Principles of Literary Criticism* he diagrams the process of seeing, reading, and understanding a literary image, using a distinctly optical framework, as shown in Figure 1 (Richards 106).

Richards explains that the six distinct processes depicted vertically here correspond to events happening in succession, through which these lines cross, as "streams of impulses flowing through in the mind" (113):

> I. The visual sensations of the printed words.
>
> II. Images very closely associated with these sensations.
>
> III. Images relatively free.
>
> IV. References to, or 'thinkings of', various things.
>
> V. Emotions.
>
> VI. Affective-volitional attitudes. (106-7)

Richards's schematic gives a sense of the complexity of the cognitive and emo-

Figure 2.1: Richards's Optical Process of Reading

tional processes involved with reading words that bear visual significance. Not everyone produces mental images, as the psychological works covered in Chapter 1 attest, but images that readers produce are amalgamations of memories, emotions, attitudes, and sensations. Crucially, they are optic. Consider the resemblance of Richards's diagram to an illustration of retinal nerves, shown in Figure 2.

Richards, along with the modernists and imagists he studied, understood the reading process as a fundamentally visual one, shaped and even controlled by the mechanisms of the eye. I hope to show the ways in which ocular phenomena may be used to study the history of ideas in this period. This relies on a number of binaries, or distinctions these theorists make: the static and the dynamic, the fragment and the whole, the idea and its expression, the near and the distant, the specific and the general, the small and the cosmic, the hard and the soft, and the dry and the wet. These are not mutually exclusive categories, as I hope will be apparent, but are loci of ambiguities and complexities which attracted these writers to them in the first place, as they do us.

Contemporary criticism has often pointed out these pairs, but almost always uses them as a starting place for symptomatic readings: for instance, in Peter Nicholls on the implications of "hard" modernism; Rachel duPlessis on gendered aspects of the "dry" and "wet" in Pound; and Gibson on the "dry" and "hard" as neoclassicist (Nicholls DuPlessis GIBSON). Jesse Schotter admirably problematizes the material membranes of the image and writing with his notion of "hieroglyphic" modernism, which synthesizes materialities of writing and image-making (Schotter). His notion of the hieroglyphic is one that fuses writing and image-production, and is present in the many faux-Egyptologies of the early 20th century, as well as in Pound's *chinoiseries*. For Martin Jay, the modernist moment is a "crisis in ocularcentrism" which reflects "a deep-seated distrust of the privileging of sight" (Jay 309). Claudia Olk, as well, argues that a break with realism in early 20th century writing shifts con-

Figure 2.2: Source: Rogers, *Perception* (Rogers)

ceptions of the visual from a representational and "natural" visual epistemology, to one a more "conceptual" and less "positivist" one:

> "The category of vision is not only central to many modernist texts, but also plays a key role in the unfolding paradigm of modernism itself. The received sense of a modernist break with realism, its pervasive interest in the workings of the individual mind, and its generic reclassifications of the novel also intimately affected the role of vision, which gained a conceptual rather than natural status. Whereas realist texts adhere to a visual language of representation and become legible within a positivist epistemology, modernist texts clearly depart from this positivist faith." (Olk 153)

Epistemologies of visual perception, then, are a subset of a larger discussion surrounding subjectivity in fiction of this period, and in particular, literary-historical shifts in the treatment of subjectivities. In *The Pound Era*, Hugh Kenner notes that despite Pound's official stance on Imagism, the movement is nonetheless "named for a component of the poem, not a state of the poet, and that its three principles establish technical, not psychic, criteria" (Kenner 179). Literary images are subjective, created in the mind of the reader, according to instructions from the poet, yet those instructions must pretend to be at least partially objective, or they will not be effectively communicated. I hope to unravel here some of these contradictions, problematize some of these dichotomies, and extend the readings of these critics to include concrete visual properties of the images created and manipulated by the writers of this period.

2.1 Persistence of Vision: Cinema and Photography; the Static and the Dynamic.

Visual perception of movement, or "vibration" as Conrad puts it, depends on an ocular phenomenon known as persistence of vision. While this phenomenon has been well-known for centuries, it only began to be studied in earnest in the latter part of the 19th century. As one researcher defines it in 1898: "the retina of the human eye retains the impression of an object for a short time after the object itself has been withdrawn" (Bruce 201). Were it not for this neurological effect, he continues, "the rain-shower would be falling drops, not lines of water; the meteor in the skies would be bereft of its glories, being merely a fiery ball, leaving no glittering path behind it" (202).

The relation between a series of images and their perceived motion is complex, and analogous to the serialization and deserialization process of reading described in the previous chapter: discrete images, if shown in rapid succession, create the illusion of continuous motion, and continuous motion may be losslessly (to borrow a term from information theory) discretized into individual images. This is the principle on which the technology of the cinema depends: to be perceived as motion, the photographs that comprise a motion picture must be projected at a rate of at least 10-12 per second. The modern frame rate for films is around 24 frames per second, but it varied in early films, from about 16 to 24 (Neumeyer 588). Since writing is by nature discrete and serial, this phenomenon is an apt metaphorical lens through which to understand turn of the century writing.

As I have argued in the previous chapter, lexical ambiguities surrounding the image are manifest in the blossoming variety of media available in the early 20th century. However, to accept this ambiguity with problematizing it, is to ignore the nuanced properties of the textual image *as* untranslated and untranslatably textual,

rather than merely a representation of the visual. Ekphrastic readings, at their most fundamental, figure textual images as derivative of prior visual phenomena, such as works of visual art. Similarly, intermedial approaches, which draw on parallels between modernist works across media, risk eliding their textual pecularities. Here, I hope to unpack the affordances of the textual medium as a vehicle of image transmission.

Writing and cinema were never far apart among the high modernists. James Joyce briefly interrupted his self-imposed exile on the continent to attempt to open a cinema in Dublin, in 1909 (Attridge xv). And as Christopher Butler compellingly argues, the simultaneity of the "Wandering Rocks" episode of *Ulysses* might owe its technique to the montage of filmmakers such as Eisenstein, with whom Joyce was in contact. Virginia Woolf's 1926 essay "The Cinema," although it begins by discussing the then-new artistic medium, spends more time discussing fiction. She is interested here in interfaces between thought and image, imaginal image and literary image:

> For what characteristics does thought possess which can be rendered visible to the eye without the help of words? It has speed and slowness; dart-like directness and vaporous circumlocution. But it has also an inveterate tendency especially in moments of emotion to make images run side by side with itself, to create a likeness of the thing thought about, as if by so doing it took away its sting, or made it beautiful and comprehensible. In Shakespeare, as everybody knows, the most complex ideas, the most intense emotions form chains of images, through which we pass, however rapidly and completely they change, as up the loops and spirals of a twisting stair. (Woolf and Bradshaw 252-3)

Here, for Woolf, literary art serializes what thought presents in parallel: it transforms images that "run side by side" with thought into "chains of images." Woolf's

spiral staircase analogy illustrates this serialization, using a favorite image of Yeats's, whose house, a rennovated Norman tower, prominently featured one; his *The Winding Stair and Other Poems* would be published in 1933. Yeats was also partial to the image of the gyre and to the cone, which derive from a theory of history he explains in *A Vision*. Pound and Wyndham Lewis, too, published the manifesto of their "Vorticist" movement only a few years earlier, one which takes as its central symbol a similar image: the vortex. Vortices, spirals, and other such symbols, are at once linear and recurrent: they repeat themselves, but with a difference. Vortices and spiral staircases are at once dizzying and transporting. Nico Israel treats this recurring symbol at length in his *Spirals*, where he argues that, "embodying tensions between teleology and cyclicality, repetition and difference, locality and globality, spirals challenge familiar modes of organizing disciplines of study" (Israel 2).

Woolf returns to this metaphor in her later essay, "How Should One Read a Book," referring again to the images of Shakespeare. Here, though, she elaborates on the quality of the image:

> reading poetry often seems a state of rhapsody … and we read on, understanding with the senses, not with the intellect, in a state of intoxication. Yet all this intoxication and intensity of delight depend upon the exactitude and truth of the image, on its being the counterpart of the reality within. Remote and extravagant as some of Shakespeare's images seem, far-fetched and etheral as some of Keats's, at the moment of reading they seem the cap and culmination of the thought; its final expression. (Woolf and Bradshaw 131-2)

Woolf's descriptors, "exactitude and truth," convey an almost scientific tone, and echo the imagist rhetoric of Ezra Pound and F.S. Flint, as we will see below. This conceives of literary representation as one more aligned with photography than painting. The ambiguity in *truth*, both the opposite of a lie and an arrow's true

flight, allows Woolf to hint that the literary image should be both representationally accurate to the thought or emotion, and mimetically accurate to the real-world referent. And as in T.S. Eliot's objective correlative, the image is that which corporializes the thought for Woolf—gives it body. Woolf's terms for Shakepeare's images, "remote" and "extravagant," depend on a notion of distance which is built into the concept of the mental image, or the image-making process, imagination.

Woolf's "truth" as accuracy appears also in Conrad, who, in a letter to H.G. Wells in 1905 congratulating him for his *A Modern Utopia*, says that, as a novelist, he "must speak in images," rather than abstractions (Aubry 16). In another letter, where Conrad gives writing advice to R. B. Cunninghame Graham, he warns, "I don't start with an abstract notion. I start with definite images and as their rendering is true some little effect is produced" (268). Like Woolf, Conrad is concerned with the accuracy of the image and its ability to faithfully represent the thought or emotion that generated it.

This essay-novel of Wells's, *A Modern Utopia*, describes a vision for a utopian world as an theatrical/cinematic image which is projected against a wall by a defective cinematograph, before which pass his two central characters, and the narrator, who resembles Wells himself:

> So much by way of portraiture is necessary to present the explorers of the Modern Utopia, which will unfold itself as a background to these two enquiring figures. The image of a cinematograph entertainment is the one to grasp. There will be an effect of these two people going to and fro in front of the circle of a rather defective lantern, which sometimes jams and sometimes gets out of focus, but which does occasionally succeed in displaying on a screen a momentary moving picture of Utopian conditions. Occasionally the picture goes out altogether, the Voice argues and argues, and the footlights return, and then you find yourself

> listening again to the rather too plump little man at his table laboriously enunciating propositions, upon whom the curtain rises now.

Wells highlights static aspects of a technology meant to depict motion ("cinematograph" is a compound of κίνημα, motion, and γράφειν, to depict), reminding us that illusion of motion that the device allows is, at its base, a sequence of still images.

2.2 Fragmentation: Parts and Wholes. Imagism.

The relation between a still image and a moving image is a subset of that between a part and its whole, in which the relation between stillness and motion is transformed from one of opposition to one of incompleteness, or potential. As in Wells's analogy, where the defects of the lantern create static images from motion, the imagist poets, or *imagistes* as Pound preferred it, conceive of images as fragments. This is subtly apparent in the way they praise the fragmentary poetry of ancient Greek and Roman poets, as well as fragments of Japanese poetry.

Brash, showy, and defiant in their rhetoric, these young poets at times seemed as interested in propagandizing their movement as participating in it. Often overlooked by critics today as well as critics then, their ideas are nonetheless seen as influential, even where unoriginal. To say that imagism has mixed reviews would be an understatement. Glen Hughes, in a 1930 retrospective of imagism, argues that it "may be characterized as the best-organized and most influential 'movement' in English poetry since the activity of the pre-Raphaelites" (Hughes vii). David Perkins, on the other hand, calls imagism "the grammar school of modern poetry, the instruction and drill in basic principles," and it is unclear whether he means this as praise, i.e., that the imagists prepared the way for later poetry, or whether that they are simplistic. Either way, he concedes that they "probably had a more distinct impact than any other group on the style of American poets" (Perkins 329). However,

it is not the purpose of this chapter to re-evaluate the imagists, but to re-examine their contributions to historical conceptions of the literary image.

One of their earliest and most well-known statements is a sequence of two short notes in a 1913 issue of *Poetry*, the first by F.S. Flint, and the second by Ezra Pound (F. S. Flint, "Imagisme"). Flint's begins with the tone of an investigative journalist, hot on the trail of the latest trend: "some curiosity has been aroused concerning *Imagisme*, and as I was unable to find anything definite about it in print, I sought out an *imagiste*, with intent to discover whether the group itself knew anything about the 'movement.' I gleaned these facts" (198–9). The irony is strong for us, and probably for some contemporaneous readers, since we know Flint to be a founding member of the imagists himself. Here, Flint names as imagist influences "the best writers of all time,"—Sappho, Catullus, and Villon. As an unusual selection, it deserves some discussion. First, the poems of Sappho, a Greek poet whose work survives only in fragments, presents a model, however unintentional, of the imagists's fragmentary brevity. Some of her fragments, if treated as intentionally short poems, would be at home in an imagist anthology.

Hugh Kenner treats Sappho's influence, and the fragmentariness of Sappho, on Pound in great detail in *The Pound Era*. Kenner shows just how little of some of Sappho's poems survive, and how much imagination would have been required for her imagist admirers. Since auxiliary grammatical structures, and fragments of words, often aren't translated intact, since they don't make much sense outside of their syntactic frame, what gets translated are the nouns, adjectives, and root verbs. In other words, what remains are images. Had Sappho's works survived intact, the imagists wouldn't have celebrated them, since their imagistic qualities are a result of the textual transformations undergone as they deteriorated into fragments, and were translated into smaller fragments.

The next of these influences, Catullus, as a neoteric poet, is known for his choices

of quotidian, rather than epic, subjects, similar to those chosen by imagists. His best known work, known as Catullus 64, is told in an ekphrastic mode—a description of an image—and begins with the lines, here translated by Sir Richard Francis Burton in 1894:

> Pine-trees gendered whilome upon soaring Peliac summit
> Swam (as the tale is told) through liquid surges of Neptune (Catullus)

This image is virtually identical to that in H.D.'s "Oread," which Pound cited as the exemplary imagist poem:

> Whirl up, sea—
> whirl your pointed pines,
> splash your great pines
> on our rocks (*Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology* 28)

Catullus, who was also inspired by Sappho, was also well-known for his love poems, known as the "Lesbia poems," many of which are unapologetically sexually explicit, i.e. specific. Richard Aldington quotes from one of these poems in the epigraph of "Daisy," which reprises the theme of Catullus 53 (13).

Another well-established influence of the imagists was the Japanese poetic form of the haiku. The haiku became popular in Europe around 1900, first in France, and then in Britain. Hiroaki Sato argues that it had a profound influence on European poetry of this time, even attributing to the haiku's influence a "reduced discursiveness in Western poetry" thereafter (Hiroaki). Haiku are traditionally characterized by the inclusion of a *kigo*, or a textual image which indicates the season: in Japan, this is typically cherry blossoms for the spring, or falling leaves for autumn. Even outside of his translations, buds, petals, and leaves are recurring themes in Pound's poetry.

The haiku evolved from the opening stanza of a *renga*, called a *hokku*, which exhibits the same 17-syllable form. Among some critics, *haiku* and *hokku* are seemingly treated as synonyms, but I argue that this distinction is crucial: a *haiku* stands alone, whereas a *hokku* is only a small part of a much larger whole. Unlike a *haiku*, a *hokku* is always already fragmentary.

A frequent character in the modernist little magazines is Yoni Noguchi, an influential Japanese writer who often wrote in English. His work is admiringly reviewed in *The Little Review* in 1915, and in 1916, he introduced the *hokku* to readers of *The Egoist*, in a short article called "Seventeen Syllable Hokku Poems" (Anderson 45; Noguchi). It begins, rather poetically for a critical work:

> The value of the seventeen-syllable Hokku poem of Japan is not in its physical directness, but in its psychological indirectness. To use a simile, it is like a dew upon lotus leaves of green, or under maple leaves of red, which, although it is nothing but a trifling drop of water, shines, glitters, and sparkles now pearl-white, then amethyst-blue, again ruby-red, according to the time of day and situation" (Noguchi 175).

The visual properties of Noguchi's simile are very prominent, especially the hue. Each of these colors is described using a translucent precious stone of the same color, which constitutes a transformation in hardness from water to stone. Noguchi makes a point to mention that they are a sequence, rather than an assemblage. The scale of this simile is also very small: on the scale of centimeters. As in Pound's early work, leaves abound, and everything is very wet. It is the scale of an object: the scale of that which can be held in the hand.

Noguchi's 1914 book, *The Spirit of Japanese Poetry* begins with a statement about economy of words that would sound at home in Pound or Lowell:

> I come always to the conclusion that the English poets waste too much

> energy in 'words, words, words,' and make, doubtless with all good intentions, their inner meaning frustrate, at least less distinguished, simply from the reason that its full liberty to appear naked is denied. (Noguchi 15).

One way to read Noguchi's "naked" poetry is as fragmentary: denuded of syntactic function, rhetoric, and performativity. It is specific, and not abstract. Small, and not grandiose. It is no coincidence that Noguchi's negative exemplar is a reference to Hamlet, which Eliot later singles out as a counterexample to his objective correlative.

Rebecca West's 1913 article on Imagism also cites "nakedness" as a feature of good poetry, suggesting that poetry should be stripped of unnecessary clothing with a ruthless austerity:

> Poetry should be burned to the bone by austere fires and washed white with rains of affliction: the poet should love nakedness and the thought of the skeleton under the flesh. But because the public will not pay for poetry it has become the occupation of learned persons, given to soft living among veiled things and unaccustomed to being sacked for talking too much. ... But there has arisen a little band who desire the poet to be as disciplined and efficient at his job as the stevedore. Just as Taylor and Gilbreth want to introduce scientific management into industry so the *imagistes* want to discover the most puissant way of whirling the scattered star dust of words into a new star of passion. (West 86)

West's images abound in part-whole relations: burning is a process which transforms single objects into many ashes; skeletons are disconnected assemblages of pieces, in contrast with the continuity of the flesh; and words are fragmentary "scattered star dust" which the poet must "whirl" into a solid "star of passion." Under a

cosmological taxonomy, all matter is star dust, but ideas, and the words that approximate them, are immaterial. West's analogy, then, gestures towards the physical, as a remedy to a poetry of abstractions.

2.3 Imaginative Distances, Ideograms.

Like fragments, ideograms—image-writing said to be expressions of ideas—fascinated the writers of the early twentieth century, especially Pound and the imagists. Although neither of the most common examples of idiographic writing, ancient Egyptian and Chinese writing, are purely or even mostly idiographic, they were so in the imaginations of many of these writers. Since the *japonismes* and *chinoiseries* of the imagists have been well-documented in recent years, (see Hayot; Qian; Qian; and Xie) I will not continue to document their warped conceptions of the East. However, I would like to contribute to the metadiscourse, by showing how it is the distance, spacial and temporal, to these faraway places that enables their distortion in the imaginations of these poets, and that this imagination is what enables the production of images.

In *ABC of Reading*, a theoretical book of his first published in 1934, but based on earlier writings, Pound explains what he imagines are the origins of Chinese ideogrammatic characters:

> When the Chinaman wanted to make something more complicated, or of a general idea, how did he go about it? He is to define red. How can he do it in a picture that isn't painted in red paint? He puts … together the abbreviated pictures of ROSE; CHERRY; IRON RUST; FLAMINGO. The Chinese 'word' or ideogram for red is based on something everyone KNOWS. (Pound, *ABC of Reading*)

Pound is likely extrapolatating this from Fenollosa's notes, but has either mis-

interpreted them, or is himself inventing a folk etymology of the Chinese word for "red." Actually, the character 紅 of 紅色, red, is composed of 糸, a skein of silk, and 工, here used as a phonetic indicator (工, gōng, for 紅, hóng). 糸 was pictogrammatic in its earliest known form, but like many Chinese characters, evolved well beyond representational recognition. This "skein of loose silk" appears in Pound's poem "The Garden," and elsewhere in his work.

Crucially, Pound either doesn't know, or avoids mentioning the phonetic indicators of Chinese writing, probably because it would complicate his "ideogrammatic method," and contradict his view of the Chinese written language "as a medium for poetry," following the title of Fenollosa's treatise (Fenollosa et al.). This is to be expected, since we now know that Pound neither spoke nor read Chinese. Yet this didn't stop him from "translating" a volume of Chinese poetry, *Cathay*, from Li Bai (李白). "Cathay" itself is an archaic term for China, chiefly used in poetry, to denote an exotic, faraway place: it appears as "far Cathay" alongside "Ceylon" and "Inde" in Lord Byron's "Don Juan," for example ("Cathay, n."). The subtitle of this volume emphasizes this sense of distance Pound sought to evoke, by tracing a long path of the provenance of the original text: "for the most part from the Chinese of Rihaku, from the notes of the late Ernest Fenollosa, and the decipherings of the professors Mori and Ariga." Rather than translating, from the Chinese, however, Pound worked from wordwise literal glosses of individual Chinese characters, as told to the American art historian Ernest Fenollosa by his Japanese tutors.

Pound's quickness to point out the provenance of his text feels anxiously insistent, not unlike the testimonials that accompany nineteenth-century hoax novels. As the only one with access to Fenollosa's notes, Pound becomes the priest with the sole power to "translate" them into poetry—had he worked directly from the Chinese texts, he would've had to have contended with Chinese scholars, who could accurately understand the original. But this marketing ploy seemed to have worked:

the celebrity of *Cathay* is what prompted T.S. Eliot, in his introduction to the 1928 *Selected Poems of Ezra Pound*, to call Pound "the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time" (Pound, *Selected Poems*). Ming Xie compellingly glosses Eliot's statement as ambiguous, however: "it could mean either that Pound, equipped with knowledge of Chinese language and literature, single-handedly *created* Chinese poetry for his contemporaries as a model for poetry, … or equally that with no knowledge of Chinese at all Pound in fact *invented*, that is 'fabricated,' an image of Chinese poetry that does not correspond to the reality of Chinese poetry" (Xie 223).

The celebration of Chinese writing in *ABC of Reading*, besides being unfaithful to the Chinese language, has the effect of romanticizing, and ultimately dismissing, Chinese poetry. By ignoring the practical aspects of Chinese characters, such as their phonetic indicators, Pound only reinforces the stereotypical conception of Chinese culture as mysterious, spiritual, or symbolic. Chinese writing is not translated, in *Cathay*, but "deciphered." However, as scholars of Chinese literature are quick to interject, Pound is too easy of a target. The interest of Pound's *Cathay* is not in its verisimilitude, that is, to its accuracy as translation, but in departure from the originals: in its *imagination*. As such, some of Pound's inventions, or imaginations, exhibit strong visual components. Timothy Billings traces some of Pound's additions to "The City of Choan," for instance, where he adds the word "bright" twice: "the bright cloths and bright caps of Shin" (Pound et al. 18). The distances to the places Pound describes allows him the freedom to inject his own imaginative visions.

One of the functions of *imagination*, that is, the willing creation of mental images, is to fill the gaps in one's sensory knowledge. Distant places, then—and to a greater degree distant and *inaccessible* ones, become a matter of imagination, or extrapolation based on limited evidence. Whereas affluent Brits of the early 20th century routinely vacationed on the European continent, the "far" East of China

and Japan lived up to its name. This was not due to the raw distance itself, but to the travel time necessary. English-language conceptions of distance are typically physical, and it is only in colloquial speech that they are temporal, in expressions such as “two hours away.” One important exception is the isochronic map. As the cartographer John Gordon Bartholemew calculated in his 1914 isochronic map of the world, inland China was in the most inaccessible category of destinations, starting from London. (Another is the Congo of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*.) While it would take a Londoner at best, 10-20 days to reach Shanghai, the places named in Li Bai could take over 40. By invoking the time-distant, then, Pound evokes an obscurantist epistemology which allows him the space for the intervention of his artistic vision.

Figure 2.3: J. G. Bartholemew, Isochrone Map, 1914

It would have been appealing for Pound to translate poems about these distant places, since so few Europeans would have had direct experience of them. Thus,

the imaginative freedom given the writer is broad, and the writing has built-in Brechtian estrangement effects: they are rich with images, since they are products of inventive imaginations. Edward Said, whose influential *Orientalism* explicitly excludes China and Japan from the category of the oriental, nonetheless writes about this distance in an applicable manner: "imaginative geography and history help the mind to intensify its own sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away" (Said 55). Pound dramatizes the distance between London and China, thereby constructing his own identity, by positioning himself as mediator.

This exotic distance is illustrated elsewhere in the era's poetry, as well. In 1928, Pound collaborated with Mark van Doren to compile an anthology, *An Anthology of World Poetry*, with additional help from Ford Madox Ford, A.E. Housman, and other poets. This anthology's structure illustrates the imaginative distances—geographic, travel, cultural, and chronological—from its publication place. Van Doren arranges this anthology's poems seemingly in order of this distance from New York: starting with Chinese and Japanese poets, moving to Sanskrit and Persian; then Hebrew, Egyptian, Greek, and Latin; moving through modern European countries; and concluding with English, Irish, and American. Pound's translations appear throughout this anthology: from the Chinese, French, German, and Latin. Only one of his originals is printed, however, "The Garden," which, along with Eliot's "Prufrock" and H.D.'s "Oread," conclude the collection, and the American section, creating the illusion that they are the culmination of this tradition. A number of regions are noticeably absent from this collection, but tellingly, the countries that are included here are ones that are usually cited as influences of the imagists and modernists. One might read van Doren's anthology as retroactively validating the thematic choices of these writers, by painting a picture of the world in which they themselves are the most worldly.

So simplified, however, Pound's version of China, and Chinese languages, is one which he says, in *ABC of Reading*, achieves "the maximum of phanopoeia" (Pound, *ABC of Reading* 42). He immediately glosses this word, which appears to be his own coinage, as that which "throw[s] a visual image on the mind." It derives from φανός: light or bright. But it is not just visual content of words that enable this linguistic function. The scene being created must possess a distance which allows for imaginative labor to take place. There are many types of distance beyond the spatio-temporal and travel distances examined here, though: there are also hypo- and hypernym distances between words, which help to create this effect.

2.4 Precision, Specificity, and Scale

The question of poetic distance is one which is invariably linked to those of specificity and scale. The leaf droplets of Noguchi and Pound are only discernible at a certain distance from the eye: several meters, perhaps, and they are only discernible as such if their boundaries may be visually detected such that they correspond to a certain lexical category. In a much-quoted passage from an early imagist manifesto, Flint lays out the "few rules, drawn up for their own satisfaction only," which the imagists had devised: "1. Direct treatment of the 'thing,' whether subjective or objective. 2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation. 3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome" (199). The first I take to mean, an ekphrastic mode in which there is little permeability between the metaphor and the emotion whose traditional, abstracted designations it illustrates. The second describes not only an economy of language, but a prohibition of certain categories of words, namely those which have no visual component. And *Presentation* here is antecedent to representation, and is a rhetoric of directness which elides agency: presentation is not fabrication, it argues, it is merely showing what is already there. This is a re-

alist stance, or in Barthes's term a "reality effect" which minimizes the role of the poet's imagination in the creation of the image (Barthes and Howard). These effects depend on notions of lexical specificity.

The essay that follows this manifesto of Flint's in *Poetry* is Ezra Pound's "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," an imagist *via negativa,* in which Pound largely defines the school according to what it is not—in Pound's terms, in "Mosaic negative." In it, he defines an "image" as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (Pound, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste" 200). This definition of image reveals a temporal component of the imagist conception of the image: an image presents not only an arrangement of objects or words, as a still-life painting might, but a frozen moment—a photograph or a film still, a dynamic scene rendered static. Pound goes on to specify that he uses the term "complex" "rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart" (200). The British psychologist Bernard Hart, in his work *The Psychology of Insanity* which appeared the previous year, explains the complex as "a system of connected ideas, with a strong emotional tone, and a tendency to produce actions of a certain definite character" (Hart 61). The example Hart gives, tellingly, is a photography hobby which is driven by a "photography complex" (62).

As elsewhere in imagist propaganda, Pound defines this movement in terms of other media, and other genres. First, he cautions poets, "don't be descriptive; remember that a painter can describe a landscape much better than you can, and that he has to know a deal more about it" (203). It is unclear here whether Pound means that a painting "describes" a landscape, metaphorically, or that a painter, having painted the landscape, can describe it in prose much better than the poet. At a basic level, it is hard for writing, imagist or otherwise, to avoid description in the strict sense of the word, when one of its primary processes is the conversion of visual information into text—a process necessarily involving description.

But what Pound seems to mean by "description" here is closer to verbosity, or prosaic, adjective-laden ekphrasis. Yet paradoxically, Pound does not eschew prose, but aligns himself with it: "Don't retell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose. Don't think any intelligent person is going to be deceived when you try to shirk all the difficulties of the unspeakably difficult art of good prose by chopping your composition into line lengths" (201–2). This attention to generic distinctions—and to blurring them—is one which we shall see appear again and again in the writers I discuss below.

Later in Pound's essay, he repeats Flint's trio of imagist rules: linguistic precision, directness, and irregular rhythm. The following year, after Pound's leadership in the group was replaced with Amy Lowell's, she, too, lists rules, but ones that have been modified somewhat, and to which three more have been added. Lowell repeats the goals of rhythmic innovation, and of image "presentation." To this, she adds that "we are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities" (*Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology* vii). Here again is an intermedial analogy, however, strangely, it is not the modern art of Wyndham Lewis, or the impressionism that inspired early Hulme, that provides the referent, but presumably a genre which values faithful representation.

"Exactitude," to Lowell, may be a matter of language economy, but may also speak to specificity and to scale. First, using the exact word might mean that one has hit the target in one shot, and can therefore stop shooting. However, since Lowell goes on to explain that "exact" means not "merely decorative," we can infer that "exact" here means something closer to "utilitarian." But what would constitute a "decorative" word? "Exact" might also refer to specificity—in linguistic terms, the hypernym level in the lexical hierarchy: *fir*, rather than *tree*. Specificity, then, is related somewhat to scale: *bough* instead of *tree*: a part-meronymic relation.

"We oppose the cosmic poet," Lowell announces, on grounds of imprecision (vii). Imprecision here is a matter of scale. The astronomical scale is one which Lowell considers irrelevant to her, and the imagists' poetic interests. Several months later, in a special issue on imagism in *The Egoist*, Harold Monro accuses the poets of the school as being "so terrified at Cosmicism that they ran away into a kind of exaggerated Microcosmicism, and found their greatest emotional excitement in everything that seemed intensely small" (Monro 78). This critique is seemingly confirmed by the first poem in the anthology, Richard Aldington's "Childhood," whose central simile is that of a "chrysalis in a match-box" (*Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology* 3). Yet, the same poem parodoxically begins on what one might call a cosmic scale: "the wretchedness of childhood / Put me out of love with God. / I can't believe in God's goodness; / I can believe / In many avenging gods." Although the speaker of Aldington's poem repudiates the cosmic, he engages with it still.

It is an unanswered question whether Aldington, or any of the imagists, are really concerned with small things, whether they only seem so in contrast to prior poets, or whether they are in fact more concerned with the cosmos as their predecessors. An unanswered, perhaps, but not unanswerable question. Furthermore, we might ask: just how small is small? How do we know what a small object is, and what a big object is? Are these sizes relative to the size of human body? If so, which human bodies, precisely? When—under what circumstances, and at what sizes—does an object stop becoming an *thing* and become a collection of things, or a even a *place*? Scale is an important visual component of writing in this period, since it speaks to manipulability: what is small is smaller than a human. An object is typically small, since it can be held in the hand, and it must be of this scale in order to be moved, and movement is what gives it boundaries which make it discernible as an object in the first place, which is what gives it a word.

2.5 Hardness and Softness

There are other physical or visual properties that Lowell here uses to describe the work in the second imagist anthology. One of the goals of the imagists, she says, is "to produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite." This word "hard" appears often in imagist rhetoric, and so it bears unpacking. While "hard" is obviously meant to be the opposite of "indefinite," as it is used in phrases like "hard left turn," "hard liquor," or "hard shadow," it also recalls physical properties of objects, like solidity, which Lowell might place opposite to conceptual ethereality. Solidity is one of the properties which help to endow objects with objecthood: water and sand are not objects, and do not take indefinite articles, since they do not cohere enough to be handled as such.

In 1918, Pound publishes an article in *Poetry* called "The Hard and Soft in French Poetry" in which he explains these terms somewhat (Ezra Pound et al. 285). I say "somewhat" because his explanation is vague: "by 'hardness' I mean a quality which is in poetry nearly always a virtue," he begins, " ... by softness I mean an opposite quality which is not always a fault." He continues, "anyone who dislikes these textural terms may lay the blame on Théophile Gautier, who certainly suggests them in *Emaux et Camées*; it is his hardness that I had first in mind. He exorts us to cut in hard substance, the shell and the Parian." He then goes on to name who, in French or, more often, in English poetry, who is "hard" and who is "soft": "since Gautier, Corbière has been hard, not with a glaze or parian finish, but hard like weather-bit granite. ... Romains, Vildrac, Spire, Arcos, are not hard, any one of them" (288). At no point in the essay does he explain these terms further.

Peter Nicholls sees the "hardness" of Pound and Lowell as "a stylistic and ethical feature of verse that represents a challenge to poetic convention: "Gautier is intent on being 'hard': is intent on conveying a certain verity of feeling, and he

ends by being truly poetic" (Nicholls 285). For Nicholls, "hardness" is a political stance, as well, where hardness "begins to attach itself to apparently incontestable ideological 'verities,' while 'softness' connotes a mythic, pre-political world where 'musical' values hold sway" (ibid.). I would agree that the resort to physical, textural properties among the imagists is a depoliticizing rhetoric, but the it also speaks to ambiguity and specificity: that which is "soft" is pliable, ambiguous, and general; what is "hard" is lexically specific and small.

One of Pound's examples of "hardness" is a few lines from Pierre-Joséph Bernard, an erotic poet, "praised by Voltaire," whom he explains has "clear hard little stanzas." The lines are from "l'Art d'aimer":

> J'au vu Daphné, Terpsichore légère,
> Sur un tapis de rose et de fougère,
> S'abandonner à des bonds pleins d'appas,
> Voler, languir… (Ezra Pound et al. 286)

Since the form and subject matter of this passage are so *légère*, its "hardness" is not easily identifiable. Pound might refer to the density, or in Lowell's phrase, "concentration" of the verses: the ratio of images or visual information carried to the syntax that carries them.

There is a distinct Hellenism in this passage that is also worth noting. In Ovid, Daphne, a river nymph who is the object of Apollo's cupid-crazed affections, transforms into a tree to escape his amorous grasp. In Bernard's modernization, Daphne's flora appear as the rose and fern designs on the rug on which she dances. The story is the subject of many neoclassical artworks, most notably Bernini's 1625 sculpture *Apollo and Daphne*, which is almost photographic in the way it captures an instant of motion.

One of the keys to understanding Lowell and Pound's "hardness" is in this continued association with Greek marble sculpture. Parian marble—mined from a quarry

on Paros—is famous for its flawlessness. When Pound derided Edward Storer's poetry as "custard" in comparison with H.D.'s "Hellenic hardness," he might have had this marble in mind (Jones 22). H.D.'s own poetic themes certainly confirm both this Hellenism and sculptural qualities: her first poem in the second imagist anthology begins, "you are clear, / O rose, cut in rock, / hard as the descent of hail" (*Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology* 22). In fact, this substance is a favorite of imagists more generally, and appears again in Richard Aldington's poem "To a Greek Marble," the second poem in the first imagist anthology: "White grave goddess, / Pity my sadness, / O silence of Paros" (Pound, *Des Imagistes* 10). The solidity, hardness, of the marble is what gives it objecthood, and distinguishes it from custard. It is also what makes it an *image*, that is, a word possessing definite visual properties.

There is a gendered dimension to this sculptural theme that deserves discussion. Rachel DuPlessis and others have noted that Pound's love poems, as well as those of other imagists, follow the genre of an ode to one's muse. The muse—less the Greek goddesses of the arts, in this sense, and more generally objects of affection—is, according to Jed Rasula's theory in *Gendering the Muse*, "the site of a poet's own embedded otherness," representing not the woman, but the poet's own romanticizations (cited in DuPlessis 390). Like a marble statue, the muse-ode genre freezes the usually female amorous object in place, almost photographically, and strips her of qualities other than her appearance. It puts the poet's lover on a pedestal, figuratively speaking, just as the sculptor does, literally.

The term which accompanies "hard" in Pound and Lowell is "clear." Parian marble is clear of imperfections, and so there is a sense in which "clear" means "pure," although that again a romanticization and a misunderstanding of the past: Greek statues, in their original contexts, would have been painted with bright colors, and wouldn't have been white, as they now appear in museums. "Pure white," of course, has a distinctly fascist ring to it, and this is only underscored by Pound's own history

as a fascist and anti-Semitic radio broadcaster, and so it would not be far-fetched to read "clear" as proto-fascist. But to highlight again the surface meaning of the term, and to make the best guess at what Lowell means here, "clear" would be closer to lexical specificity. Lowell chooses a visual metaphor, where objects are visible when they're focused by the mind's eye. "Clear" can also mean "transparent," or "unclouded," which leads us to associate poetic murkiness with abstraction. Going further, we might posit that clarity speaks to a richness of visual properties which can be inferred from the specificities of certain nouns and adjectives.

These ideas do not originate with Pound and Lowell, but appear in the works of the philosopher-poet T.E. Hulme, who is often named as the spiritual "father of imagism" (Hughes 9). A notorious anti-authoritarian, Hulme was famously "sent down" from Cambridge for unspecified "disturbances" (Jones 161-2). His "Notes on Language and Style," which was probably written in 1907, was published posthumously in 1925 (224). There, we find Hulme using "firm" and "solid" as descriptors for the kinds of books he promotes:

> Rising disgust and impatience with the talking books, e.g. Lilly and the books about Life, Science, and Religion. All the books which seem to be the kind of talk one could do if one wished. Rather choose those in old leather, which are *solid*. Here the man did not talk, but saw solid, definite things and described them. Solidity a pleasure. (Hulme 39)

Hulme contrasts "solidity" with "talk," which supports a reading of "hard" as not the opposite of "soft," but terse, economical. Unlike Pound, he does not reject description, but sees the writing process—at least that of "the man" who writes leatherbound books—as a process which begins with visual experience, is cognitively categorized into "definite things," and ends with description. In contrast, "talk," for Hulme, is language which is abstracted, and at a remove from, sensory experience. He later explains this process in mathematical terms:

> …in algebra, the real things are replaced by symbols. These symbols are manipulated according to certain laws which are independent of their meaning. … An analogous phenomenon happens in reasoning in language. We replace meaning (i.e. /vision/) by words. These words fall into well-known patterns, i.e. into certain well-known phrases which we accept without thinking of their meaning, just as we do the *x* in algebra. (37)

Hulme equates "meaning" with "vision," implying a primacy of visual experiences in the constructions of words. He also attributes clichés to habit and to thinking which takes place at a remove from vision. Later, he draws the distinction between *rhetoric* and *solid vision*:

> All emotion depends on real solid vision or sound. It is physical. But in *rhetoric* and expositional prose we get words divorced from any real vision. Rhetoric and emotion—here the connection is different. So perhaps literary expression is from *Real* to *Real* with all the intermediate forms keeping their *real* value." (38)

Hulme's conception of *rhetoric* seems to be a teleological, pragmatic prose which he opposes with an ateleological, or autotelic art centered around visual experience. Its use as a pejorative term among the imagists is treated at length in John Gage's work on imagist rhetoric, and may be traced at least to Yeats's essay, "Emotion of Multitude," in which he famously calls rhetoric "the will trying to do the work of the imagination" (Gage; Yeats 215).

Like Pound, Hulme finds that prose is typically more aligned with his ideal poetic criteria than Romantic poetry.

> The contrast between (i) a firm simple prose, creating in a definite way a fairy story, a story of simple life in the country … Here we have the

> microcosm of poetry. The pieces picked out from which it comes. Sun and sweat and all of them. Physical life and death fairies. And (ii) on the other hand, genteel poetry like Shelley's, which refers in elaborate analogies to the things mentioned in (i). (39)

His use of "physical" is unusual for imaginary beings, but the paradox highlights the importance, for Hulme's poetics, of writing that evokes physical properties, meaning, usually, visual properties, as well: "sun" and "sweat" are not merely emblems—of happiness, hard work, or otherwise—but have discernible sizes, colors, and other visual properties.

In a later essay, "Romanticism and Classicism," probably written around 1911, Hulme draws the distinction between the two eponymous forces that he sees as opposing factors in cultural history. "After a hundred years of romanticism," he begins, "we are in for a classical revival" (71). Here, he disparages the habits of "the romantic," who, "because he thinks man is infinite, must always be talking about the infinite … The word infinite is in every other line. … In the classical attitude you never seem to swing right along to the infinite nothing" (71-2). Hulme might object to the use of the word "infinite" on grounds that the scale is irrelevant to human concerns, or that it's difficult to visualize: it has no visual properties.

2.6 Dry and Wet

In "Romanticism and Classicism," Hulme refers to the "classical attitude," in terms Pound would later adopt, as having "dry hardness":

> How many people now can lay their hands on their hearts and say they like either Horace or Pope? They feel a kind of chill when they read them. The dry hardness which you get in the classics is absolutely repugnant to them. Poetry that isn't damp isn't poetry at all. They cannot see that

> accurate description is a legitimate object of verse. Verse to them always means a bringing in of some of the emotions that are grouped round the word infinite. (75)

The "dry" / "damp" dichotomy here introduces a new figuratively physical set of poetic properties, as Hulme sees them. "Dry," when used of writing, usually means "boring": technical manuals are "dry." The OED gives, in sense 17 for "dry,": "deficient in interest; unattractive, distasteful, insipid. (figurative from food that wants succulency.)" ("Dry, Adj. and Adv."). Yet Hulme is certainly not suggesting that writing should be boring, or distasteful. Instead, the liquid, in his metaphor, emotion, abstraction, or unnecessary ambiguity: factors that inhibit the transference or translation of a mental image from poet to reader.

As Sarah Barnsley points out, Pound's poetry does not follow this stricture, since a common theme of his is wetness. Whereas Barnsley identifies in H.D. pervasive imagery of dryness, such as dry sand, she catalogues several instances in Pound of wet botanical imagery, namely, "a wet leaf that clings to the threshold," ("Lie Ch'e"), "the petal fall in the fountain," ("Ts'au Chi'h"); "petals on a wet, black bough" ("in a Station of the Metro"); "as cool as the pale wet leaves" ("Alba"), and "the dew is upon the leaf" ("Coitus") (Barnsley 45). In contrast to Pound, she concludes, H.D. "fashions a feminine sphere through imagery of hard, dry textures that find no correlation in the damp, soft textures styling Pound's Imagist sphere at this time" (ibid.). While there is some truth to this gendering of dry and wet among the imagists, I would like to emphasize its physical, and thus visual, properties. The imagery of wetness—and especially wet foliage—likely has its origin in the climate of Japan. Since southern Japan experiences an annual "wet" or rainy season, and that season is invariably accompanied with the blossoming of flowers, this image is the *kigo* which signifies the season.

In more visual terms, wetness, as we have seen in Noguchi, is that which creates

a scintillating visual effect: when things are wet, they sparkle. Thus, Noguchi's comparison of water droplets to precious stones is one that—on the surface—compares similar phenomena of light (Noguchi 175).

2.7 Image and Symbol; Image and Rhetoric

The imagists are quick to assert that images are not symbols, even when they still operate as signifiers. And Hulme is insistent on a dichotomy between images and rhetoric, even while blurring that distinction in practice. The symbolic order is never completely escapable in writing, since language itself is a set of symbols. Given that premise, imagist rhetoric feels at best naive, and at worst a failed marketing ploy. But it is for this reason that the boundaries between images and symbols deserve exploration.

To trace the genealogy of the image/symbol dichotomy even further, Hulme's major philosophical influence, a French thinker whose books he often translated and reviews, was Henri Bergson. Besides being a well known and widely read philosopher of the period, his ideas appear often in the essays of this period's literary writers (Gillies). It is probably from Bergson, in fact, that Hulme derives his ideas of instantaneity, and circumvention of the symbol in art. In Hulme's translation of Bergson's *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, we see this "direct treatment of the thing" explained:

> If there exists any means of possessing a reality absolutely instead of knowing it relatively, of placing oneself within it instead of looking at it from outside points of view, of having the intuition instead of making the analysis: in short, of seizing it without any expression, translation, or symbolic representation—metaphysics is that means. *Metaphysics, then, is the science which claims to dispense with symbols.* (Bergson 9, emphasis in the original.)

We hear in Bergson's metaphysics an attempt to escape the symbolic order through direct experience, direct "knowing" of "a reality," and direct "seizing" it, without mediation. It is *unmediated*, therefore *immediate*; *instant*, therefore *simultaneous*. His aesthetic theory, or theory of perception more generally, depends on the conception of subjectivities of time for which he is famous: the *temps / durée* dichotomy. Later, Bergson, through Hulme, explains his notion of the image, in similarly temporal terms:

> Now the image has at least this advantage, that it keeps us in the concrete. No image can replace the intuition of duration, but many diverse images, borrowed from different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized. By choosing images as dissimilar as possible, we shall prevent any one of the from usurping the place of the intuition it is intended to call up, since it would then be driven away at once by its rivals." (ibid. 16)

Images are only discernible, Bergson seems to say, through contrast with their surroundings, and with each other. Though their dissimilarities, they produce an effect of immediacy, which Hulme echoes, then Pound, and then Eliot and other writers of this period.

Many of the imagists' conceptions of the image may also be traced to the French writer and critic Remy de Gourmont, whose work was often featured alongside imagists in *The Egoist*. In a 1915 article in *The Fortnightly Review*, Pound praises his "intelligence" for its "limpidity and fairness and graciousness, and irony, and a sensuous charm in his decoration when he chose to make his keen thought flash out against a richly-colored background" (Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909-1965* 413-23). Although Pound does nod to Gourmont's attention to the senses, it is somewhat parodoxical, or at least self-contradictory, for Pound that he would praise anyone's

writerly "decoration," after rejecting said decoration just previously in his writings on imagism. Richard Aldington, in a later review, praises him not for his use of images, by for the ways in which his philosophy permeates his creating writing. But most of all, Aldington highlights his antiauthoritarianism: his "philosophic anarchism," which was "too far-seeing to become imprisoned in a system" (Richard Aldington 169). "His thought," he warns, "is a kind of pungent acid under whose action social humbugs and moral shams dissolve." The force of this praise is the kind that lends credence to readings of these early modernist writers as proto-fascists. Yet Aldington, the imagists, and this period of literary history, see in Gourmont a figure whose thought promises the decisive break with tradition they wanted, and the fault lines for that break grow in the realms of the visual.

Gourmont's own description of his writing, and his instructions for good writing, is not only much more subdued, but helps to shed light on its visual properties, and the intermedial metaphors he requires to describe them:

> Écrire bien, avoir du style, … user d'un style « descriptif ou de couleur », c'est peindre. La faculté maîtresse du style, c'est donc la mémoire visuelle. Si l'écrivain ne voit pas ce qu'il décrit, ce qu'il raconte, paysages et figures, mouvements et gestes, comment aurait-il du style, c'est-à-dire, en somme, de l'originalité? Le peintre qui travaille « de chic » a devant les yeux la scène imaginaire qu'il traduit à mesure. De fort belles oeuvres ont été faites ainsi. Qui dit peintre, dit visuel. (de Gourmont)
>
> [To write well, to have style, … to use a descriptive or colorful style, is to paint. The mastery of style, therefore, is the visual memory. If the writer doesn't see what he describes, what he recounts, landscapes and figures, movements and gestures, how can he have style, which is to say, originality? The painter who works fashionably has before his eyes the imaginary schene which he translates. He then paints strongly beautiful

works as a result. He who talks of painting, talks of the visual.]

Writing as painting, or more specifically, *describing* as painting, is an old an often-used analogy, but one which takes on new meaning in the age of such schools of painting as abstract expressionism and post-impressionism. *Chez les imagistes*, it is no longer the writer's job to faithfully represent the visual experience of the narration, but just *a* visual experience, one which evokes the emotion felt by the writer. These are symbols, of course, but they are symbols that pretend to be perfect substitutes for the thing-in-itself.

Imagist rhetoric borrows heavily from the French symbolists of a decade or two earlier. In fact, the repeated imagist insistence that they are *not* symbolists is probably the clearest indication that they are (Taupin and Pratt). Like the imagists, they also published a manifesto: "The Symbolist Manifesto," Jean Moréas wrote and published in *Le Figaro* in 1886. In it, he declares symbolist poetry to be "ennemie de l'enseignement, de la déclamation, de la fausse sensibilité, de la description objective," [enemy of pedagogy, declaration, false sensibility, and objective description] and that it looks to "vêtir l'Idée d'une forme sensible qui, néanmoins, ne serait pas son but à elle-même, mais qui, tout en servant à exprimer l'Idée, demeurerait sujette [clothe the idea in a sensory form which, nevertheless, would not be an end in itself, but which, in service of the expression of the Idea, would remain the subject] (Vanier 33-4).

Although symbolism is against "objective description," it yet seeks to convey ideas through the use of symbols and objects: symbolist poetry is ideas clothed in the *sensory*. Pound insists that "imagism is not symbolism," but the image as vehicle for emotion is suspiciously analogous to the symbol as clothes for the idea. In fact, much of what Flint says of imagism in *Poetry* he says of Symbolism earlier the same year. In his essay, "Contemporary French Poetry," he calls symbolism "a contempt for the wordy flamboyance of the romanticists" (F. Flint, "Contemporary French Po-

etry" 355). "Flamboyance" recalls Pound and Lowell's "ornament" or "decoration": words that can be removed without changing the meaning of the poem, or words which contribute nothing to the aim of the poem.

William Butler Yeats, an inspiration to the imagists, and with whom Pound worked closely, often writes of poetic practice in terms of its sister arts, or using analogies derived from the plastic arts. In an early essay, "What is Popular Poetry?", he writes of his desire for a new national poetry, "which would not be an English style and yet would be musical and full of colour" (Yeats 3). What Yeats means by "colour" here might be closer to its use in the expression "local color," rather than literal colors, but it still speaks to a visual dimension to his ideal poetry. In a later essay, "The Symbolism of Poetry," Yeats praises Arthur Symons's critical work, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature,* a seminal work for many imagists. In it, he shows what he means by "symbolism," and illustrates it with two lines from Burns: "the white moon is setting behind the white wave, / and Time is setting with me, O!". Those lines, he claims,

> are perfectly symbolical. Take from them the whiteness of the moon and of the wave, whose relation to the setting of Time is too subtle for the intellect, and you take from them their beauty. But, when all are together, moon and wave and whiteness and setting Time and the last melancholy cry, they evoke an emotion which cannot be evoked by any other arrangement of colours and sounds and forms. We may call this metaphorical writing, but it is better to call it symbolical writing, because metaphors are not profound enough to be moving, when they are not symbols, and when they are symbols they are the most perfect of all... (155-6)

While "whiteness" is not *entirely* too subtle for the intellect—it recalls the white hair of old age, for one—it shows that, for Yeats, the visual properties of poetic im-

ages are what allow them convey the otherwise ineffable, and what allow them to draw analogies across unrelated domains. This is the same phenomenon Woolf hints at with her properties of "thought," and toys with the properties of the visual realm as are, and as they appear: in both their subjective and objective senses.

2.8 Subjective and Objective

Parian marble is an object: an object of the gaze, but also a grammatical object. Although Flint's first dictum, "direct treatment of the thing, whether subjective or objective," appears to take no stance in this dichotomy, T.S. Eliot does. An influential poet/critic of this period, and a friend of Pound, Woolf, and other imagists, T.S. Eliot reviews J.M. Robertson's *The Problem of Hamlet* in 1919, and sketches his theory of the "objective correlative," a notion which shares properties with the imagist "image" (Eliot). Scholars have often noted that Eliot's is by no mean a new conception, as it is found in many other critics and philosophers, but has a few unique properties (Frank 311). In his essay, Eliot contrasts these lines of Hamlet, Act I—"look, the morn, in russet mantle clad / Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill"—with a few "quite mature" but "unstable" lines from Act V—"Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting / that would not let me sleep" (Eliot 941). The latter is probably what he earlier calls Shakespeare's "superfluous and inconsistent scenes which even hasty revision should have noticed." This is pure imagism. Its insistence on revision for concision, distaste for abstractions (if we read "instable" as opposite to "concrete") and preference for visual information are all found in the imagist propaganda of Pound, Flint, and Lowell. Furthermore, the quote from Hamlet is also Pound's, from "A Few Don'ts." Although where Pound doesn't quite get the quote right, revising it to "dawn in russet mantle clad," Eliot does. They both, however, attribute these lines to "Shakespeare," rather than to his character Horatio, effectively hiding an easy explanation for the contrast between these two passages: dif-

ferences in character speech patterns—Hamlet is much more given to abstraction than Horatio.

In explaining his reasons for what he considers the "failure" of Hamlet, Eliot announces that:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." (941)

Again, we hear the echo of Pound's theory of images as emotional expressions, and Pound and Lowell's calls for particularity. Perhaps more importantly, we see the expansion of the imagist definition of Pound's to include "events," which adds a Bergsonian temporal dimension to the earlier notion of image. In an almost desperate attempt to avoid the symbol, or figurativity more generally, Eliot insists that "language in a healthy state presents the object, is so close to the object that the two are identical" [quoted in Gage, 3). It is impossible for an object and its linguistic representation to be identical, but this is a rhetorical move which shows Eliot gesturing towards a surface reading, *avant la lettre*. Put differently, he wants us to *see* the object as rendered in text for what it is, rather than dismissing it as merely a signifier that points to some greater abstraction.

2.9 Coda

Textual images, as conceived by this period's many imagisms, have a number of discernible visual properties. They are often free of "decoration" or "ornament"—"dry." We might construe decoration as as a term or set of terms both extrinsic to the information conveyed by the syntactic frame, and possessing also some other

redeeming value, whether as a pleasant sonic quality or other similar property. Images also convey visual information, such as color, shape, size, or space. This visual information is well-defined, that is, carries "hard" boundaries. Images represent, or convey, an "emotional complex"—they must be translatable into human emotion. Therefore, they would need to interact on some level with the human scale, and with human conceptions of objects. Images represent events or experiences: occurrences in time. They do not always take place in time, but are suggestive of the passage of time. A skein of silk blown against a wall, as in Pound's poem "The Garden," holds within it a kind of potential energy: the silk will fall, and so the image contains within it the suggestion of a future movement through time. As seen, as written, as read, as experienced, and as imagined, Images are distinct entities from one another, yet analogous. The media of each condition their potential properties. They are interdependent, and are in some cases translations of each another.

What can we do with this information? For one, this gives us a taxonomy of visual properties which we can use to test, quantitatively, trends in visual phenomena over the course of this period of time. For another, we now have a number of hypotheses related to these visual properties which we can verify. For example, is imagistic or impressionistic writing more dense with haiku-like nature imagery, or is that merely a side-effect of the world-literary interests of the imagists? Are the sizes of things represented in this writing that much smaller—less "cosmic"—than elsewhere? How much more often do the jewel-bright colors of Noguchi appear than other colors? It will be the task of the following chapters to answer these questions and more.

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