

In what way imagist poetry influences modernists flashcard

[Profession](#), [Poet](#)



1. Introduction The England-based Georgians had been attacked by the modernists as “unoriginal and slack in technique, shallow in feeling, slight in intellect...

and weekend escapism” (David 1976, p. 204). The American-based Genteel Mode, on the other hand, was also criticized as “...

in its Romantic spiritual elevation it did not grapple with experience...” (David 1976, p. 204). Modernist writers contended that the society had undergone enormous changes at the beginning of the twentieth century and that the carefree and relaxed attitude, which was representative of Georgian poetry and the Genteel Mode cannot present the real situation of the society and demanded that people should break away from traditions.

Imagists were such a group of poets who refused to obey and challenged the traditions of poetry composition (some of these practices, though, were disapproved by some of the critics). As David put it, “imagism has been described as the grammar school of modern poetry,” which means that it plays a fundamental role in influencing the way along which later modernist writers followed to create their work. Reviewing how imagism reacted against history would facilitate understanding of how modernism came into shape. This essay thus is aimed at analyzing certain characteristics of the Imagists poetry and how it is reflected or inherited by later modernist writers: the return to classicism; the break-away from old traditions of poetry form; content and language with modern characteristics; image and consciousness. 2. The Return to Classicism One of the beliefs in respect to

modern poetry is that the core of the movement is to return to classicism (Peter 1999, p.

68). Although this comment is not adequate in terms of evaluation, it recognizes the reality of the development of modern poetry. The Classical Poetry lost its liveliness in the nineteenth century and deteriorated into rigidity. Hence it was replaced by the Romantic Poetry, which also ceased to be so at the twentieth century. What is ironic is that modernists, in a large scale, sought inspiration from The Classical Poetry.

Firstly, they adopted a lot of allusion to mythology. The Waste Land, written by T. S. Eliot, is one of the most representative works which have bearing on this characteristic. In fact, the Imagist poetry of the early period had already shown this feature. The most notable examples are the poems written by H.

D.. She was enthusiastic in the culture and traditions of ancient Greek. That being the reason, most of the themes of her poems touched on Greek mythology. One of the lines in H.

D.'s poem "Epitaph" also illustrates her obsession with the Greek culture, "Greek flower; Greek ecstasy /reclaims for ever". What is more, it is known that H. D.'s poems achieved an unprecedented success and she was regarded as "the purest imagist" (David 1976, p.

339). Her poems were usually composed of short sentences. The structure of her poems was highly compact; the themes originated from Greek mythology, sentimental comments, which occurred in the work of Romantic

Poetry, were infrequent. Take one of her poems, " Epigram" 1 for example:
The golden one is gone from the banquets; She, beloved of Atimetus, The
swallow, the bright Homonoëa; Gone the dear chatterer. Not only is the
structure pertaining to the Greek and classical, the theme itself is one of
those stories from Ancient Greek.

This is one of the typical earlier examples produced by one of the Imagists
who tried to emulate classical Greek poetry. Nevertheless, the sui generis
characteristic and writing techniques of the Imagists are not fully displayed
in poems in imitation of Greek poetry. A more famous poem " Oread", which
is also written by H. D.

, could claim for the uniqueness of the Imagist poetry. Whirl up, sea-Whirl
your pointed pines. Splash your great pines
On our rocks. Hurl your green
over us-Cover us with your pools of fir. The structure of the poem is simple,
nonetheless, it imposes great impression on readers-David claimed that the
effect was instant (1976, p.

338). The poem does not include any emotional expression. It only presents
two images, the pines and the sea and they seem to blend into one single
image. Further description or expression of emotions would be redundant or
damage the seemingly single image. The rigorous poem structure of the
Classicism and the image, which Imagists place emphasis on, are fit well into
one another.

Another poem that fully displays the compact structure of Classical Poetry is
" In a Station of the Metro." There are only fourteen words in this poem: The

apparition of these faces in the crowd; Petals on a wet, black bough. Once more, none of the words could be expunged. The poem could be compared to one of those Impressionist paintings, which are only composed of simple lines and colors of contrast. Even though what is contained in a poem or a picture is limited, the space allowed for imagination is infinite. What is fascinating about Imagist poetry is that the expressivity under its condensed structure is immeasurable.

However, some people also pointed out that this form was tremendously limited (Hughes 1972, p. 45) and discussed the losses it incurred. It is yet important to recognize the efforts of imagists in seeking for a new poetic structure. 3. Unconventional Form: Vers Libre It should be known that the Imagists did not exactly copy the artistic skills of the Classical poetry, especially that of Greek poetry, but that they selectively inherited the merits and developed them.

The breakthrough the Imagists made with regard to rhythm and rhyme is most noticeable. One of the advocacy made by Ezra Pound was that poets should “break away from iambic pentameter” (Peter 1999, p. 68). Obvious or strict form was rarely seen in Imagist poetry. Imagist poetry has nearly abandoned the traditional form of poetry and was in its pursuit of vers libre. Viewing from a panorama of modern poetry, vers libre is actually the mainstream poetry form.

Imagists thus can be claimed as the precursors of the free verse. What Imagists focus on is the rhythm of a poem, the “innate” rhythm of the

poetry language; “ the whole poem must be rounded and recurring as the circular swing of a balanced pendulum” (Martin 2009, p. 16). Pound believed that poets should not end a poem exactly at each line to conform to the traditional poetic form but should “ let the syllables so fall as to increase and continue the movement”, achieving the uniformity and harmony of a poem. “ Oread”, which is mentioned above, is not a poem with strict poetic form. Nonetheless, it is not regarded as non-poetic.

The whole poem revolves around “ sea” and “ pines”; each line is closely followed by the next line. In addition, the poet adopted the method of appealing, which renders the emotions of the poem sincere and passionate. That being so, a poem lacking a strict form does not necessarily mean that it is not poetical but that it is allowed more freedom to establish smoothness and harmony. Nevertheless, free verse cannot escape criticism.

It was assailed by the Professor John Livingston Lowes (Hughes 1972, p. 65) that it may not be as well converted to the English language as French and by Padraic Colum (Hughes 1972, p. 63) that “ it is a poor form for wit”. Despite the criticism, it should be acknowledged that Imagists’ intention to pursue the idiosyncratic rhythm indeed freed themselves and the later modernists from the “ shackles” of the traditional poetry form and permitted poetry to have more capacity to contain new themes of the times. 4.

Innovative Content and LanguageAs for the themes, it is difficult to impose a description on what is included in Imagist poetry, which ranges from flowers, grass, trees in the nature to many aspects of the modern city life. Imagists

believed that modern life had its own values. The great changes taking place at the outset of the twentieth century undoubtedly would draw the attention of the Imagists' and their poetry would inevitably reflect certain aspects of modern life. This is exemplified by a poem "Evening", written by Richard Aldington.

The chimneys, rank on rank, Cut the clear sky; The moon
With a rag of gauze about her loins
Poses among them, an awkward Venus-
And here am I looking wantonly at her
Over the kitchen sink. With a modern meaning behind, the moon juxtaposing with chimney presents a fresh image towards readers. The moon in Romantic poetry is gentle, soft and romantic. In contrast, the moon here is foul and degraded.

What the poet inclined to reveal was that the industrial pollution had damaged the nature and expressed his disgust and contempt towards the pollution, which can be deemed as the modern feature of this poem. Another poet who based his poems mostly on urban life is John Gould Fletcher. The city life under his pen hardly arouses any aesthetic feelings in readers' mind. The following is an extract from "Dawn":
Sleep oozes out of stagnant ash-barrels,
Sleep drowns over litter in the streets. Sleep nods upon the milkcans by back doors. And, in shut rooms, Behind the lowered window-blinds, Drawn white faces unwittingly flout the day.

Ash-barrels, milk cans, window-binds, which are the articles in everyday use in modern society. Glenn explained that the poet glanced at the articles every now and again as they were evidence of the ugly and pain-causing

world (1931, p. 90). Fletcher did not laud the convenience the above items bring to people but exhibited their dullness and ugliness.

The poet was living in a vigorous modern society, enjoying all the advantages of modern life; the city under his portrait was unexpectedly lifeless. What's more, Dawn should be a symbol of vitality, but it also appears to be tedious, boring. It can be assumed that the poet attempted to inform the readers that urban life was unanimated and without aesthetics. Referring back to the "In a Station of the Metro", it can be realized that Pound also chose metro, one of the symbols of modern society, to present the impact of modern civilization on people.

"The apparition of these faces" can be understood as people in the fast-paced society are gradually detached from nature and eventually lose their identities. It should be noted that the reflection upon and criticism against the modern civilization is not only one of the significant themes of Imagist poetry, but also one of central themes of modern literature. It is no denying that Imagists poets were inspired by Modern society and urban life to create the new theme mentioned above. Since the language of poems cannot be separated from the content, it is reasonable that at the same time they also demanded to free their language. Imagists contended that the language in Romantic poetry, which is seemingly gracefully, actually deviates from the real life. They believed that the development of the society had rendered poems universal, which means that poetry should no longer belong exclusively to the upper class and the language should be that of everyday communication.

As a consequence, opposing to the romantic language which they regarded as superfluous and flowery, they proposed to stress on the accurateness of the words and ‘ design their poems in a more conversation-rhythm pattern’ (Peter 1999, p. 122), which means that they would opt for a more conversational language in their poems. It can be observed that the language used in Imagist poetry is rarely genteel but is fresh, vivid and full of vitality. One of the poets who wrote poems typical of this language is William Carlos.

He advocated applying into poems everyday language other than the obscure language, which can only be comprehended by few people. “ Red Wheelbarrow” is one of the modal poems which utilize the simple language. So much depends upon a red wheelbarrow glazed with rainwater beside the white chickens. The language in this poem is considered by Robert (2004, p. 73) as a usual prose sentence divided into an unusual manner. The simplicity of the language seems to blur the boundary between poems and prose, which also challenges our idea of traditional poetic language. Despite the language, the poem succeeds in portraying a picture which manifests colors of contrast and combines the animated objects with the motionless ones. The leaden sky, the red wheel, and white chicken set off one another.

This kind of everyday language and visually vivid description slowly came into use by other poets, especially after the WW?. It again proves that Imagists were at the front in the modern poetry movement.