



## Heliodora notes.

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Amy Lowell's Tendencies in Modern Amer-  
ican Poetry.

From the chapter on "The Imagists: H.D. and John Gould Fletcher"

"H.D."'s life is that of a true artist. It is one of internal mental and emotional experiences, not of external events.

One of the little band of poets with whom "H.D." now identified herself was Richard Aldington, the well-known Imagist. Like "H.D.", Mr. Aldington was fascinated by Greek culture; the flawless purity of Greek models was a perpetual source of delight to him. Mr. Pound in his life of the young Vorticist sculptor, Gaudier Brzeska, has told of the long discussions between these two; Brzeska wishing to cut away all bonds with the past, Richard Aldington firmly insisting that the Hellenic outlook was more needed to-day than ever.

At this age of pedantic learning, or no learning at all, it is strange to find two young people reading Greek "for fun." But this was just what H.D. and Mr. Aldington did. The Imagists seem to have a natural flair for languages.

"H.D." and Richard Aldington were married on October 18, 1913.

Writing in a highly and most carefully wrought vers libre, "H.D."'s poems achieve a beauty of cadence which has been surpassed by no other vers librists. Indeed, her subtly changing rhythms are almost without an equal. Never in her verse, do we find a prose suggestion. Hers are not, as some of her husband's are, the piquant paradoxes of romance springing out of plain fact.

To this poet, beauty is a thing so sharp as to be painful, delight so poignant it can scarcely be borne. Her extreme sensitiveness turns appreciation to exquisite suffering. Yet again and again, she flings herself bravely upon the spears of her own reactions.

The poet is, like Robert Frost, suffering from a too minute and impressing observation--observation and its correlative, imagination; . . .

Her practice, and that of her husband is absolutely to abandon the rhythms of metre when writing cadenced verse. Some vers libriſts permit themselves occasional lines which might be timed by the old scansion, if only such lines also fall within the circle of their cadence, but "H.D." and Mr. Aldington never do.

(Amy Lowell likes Sea-Gods because of the violet part)

"H.D." is peculiarly a poet of flowers, and in the very manner in which she uses her flowers, we have hints of that changed technique of which I have been speaking.

"H.D." is not a poet of great breadth of mood nor of many moods. All her effects are delicate rather than broad. She is also essentially a lyric poet. Even in those poems which aim at a sort of narrative suggestion like "The Helmsman" . . . .

"H.D."'s work deals entirely with those things which are constant and eternal. She seems quite unaffected by the world about her. Cliffs and sea, and flowers, have always been the same;

Other poets are possessed of a vision which can perceive a new beauty in the modern world; we shall see Mr. Fletcher doing this. But "H.D." has no such insight

There are people who find this poetry cold. But it is a mistake to suppose that this coolness, this clearness, covers no feeling.

"H.D." is not a great poet, but she is a rarely perfect poet.

It is true that she employ the same technique throughout her work, and that is perhaps monotonous to those who are not concerned with its excellence. It also bears with it the seeds of over-care, of something bordering on preciousity. There is a certain thinness in the original conception, and only the lustre of its polish saves it. But this is a lustre known to no one else.

The tricks of her manner occasionally recall the Greek, but her thoughts are entirely her own. Her

Sea Iris

I

Weed, moss-weed,  
root tangled in sand,  
sea-iris, brittle flower,  
one petal like a shell  
is broken,  
and you print a shadow  
like a thin twig.

Fortunate one,  
scented and stinging,  
rigid myrrh-bud,  
camphor-flower,  
sweet and salt--you are wind  
in our nostrils.

II

Do the murex-fishers  
drench you as they pass?  
Do your roots drag up colour  
from the sand?  
Have they slipt gold under you--  
Rivets of gold?

Band of iris-flowers  
above the waves,  
you are painted blue,  
painted like a fresh prow  
stained among the salt weeds.

Sea Lily

Reed,  
slashed and torn  
but doubly rich--  
such great heads as yours  
drift upon temple-steps,  
but you are shattered  
in the wind.

Myrtle-bark  
is fleched from you,  
scales are dashed  
from you stem,  
sand cuts your petal,  
furrows it with hard edge,  
like flint  
on a bright stone.

Yet though the whole wind  
slash at your back,  
you are lifted up,  
aye--though it hiss  
to cover you with froth.

The Helmsman

O be swift--  
we have always known you wanted us.

We fled inland with our flocks,  
we pastured them in hollows,  
cut off from the wind  
and the salt track of the marsh.

We worshipped inland--  
we stepped past wood-flowers  
we forgot your land,  
we brushed wood-grass.

We wandered from pine-hills  
through oak and scrub-oak tangles,  
we broke hyssip and bramble,  
we caught flower and new bramble-fruit  
in our hair: we laughed  
as each branch whipped back,  
we tore our feet in half buried rocks  
and knotted roots and acorn-cups.

We forgot--we worshipped,  
we parted green from green,  
we sought further thickets,  
we dipped our ankles  
through leaf-mould and earth,  
and wood and wood-bank enchanted us--

and the feel of the clefts of the bark  
and the slope between tree and tree--  
and the slender path strung field to field  
and wood to wood  
and hill to hill  
and the forest after it.

We forgot--for a moment  
tree-resin, tree-bark,  
sweat of a torn branch  
were sweet to the taste.

We were enchanted with the fields,  
the tufts of coarse grass  
in the shorter grass--  
we loved all this.

But now our boat climbs--hesitates--drops--  
climbs-- hesitates--crawls back--  
O be swift--  
we have always known you wanted us.

From Amy Lowell's Tendencies in Modern American Poetry.

Here is a poem which shows her shrinking from this piercing appreciation of the beauty of nature:

### Orchard

I saw the first pear  
as it fell--  
the honey-seeking, golden-banded,  
the yellow swarm  
was not more fleet than I,  
(spare us from loveliness)  
and I fell prostrate  
crying:  
you have flayed us  
with your blossoms,  
spare us the beauty  
of fruit-trees.

The honey-seeking  
paused not,  
the air thundered their song,  
and I alone was prostrate.

O rough-hewn  
god of the orchard,  
I bring you an offering--  
do you, alone unbeautiful,  
son of the god,  
spare us from loveliness:

these fallen hazel-nuts,  
stripped late of their green sheaths,  
grapes, red-purple,  
their berries  
dripping with wine,  
pomegranates already broken,  
and shrunken figs  
and quinces untouched,  
I bring you as offering.

Now that Your Eyes are Shut

Now that your eyes are shut  
Not even a dusty butterfly may brush them;  
My flickering knife has cut  
Life from somorous lion throats to hush them.

If pigeons croon too loud  
Or lambs bleat proudly, they must come to slaughter,  
And I command each cloud  
To be precise in spilling silent water.

Let light forbear those lids:  
I have forbidden the feathery ash to smutch them;  
The spider thread that thrids  
The gray-plumed grass has not my leave to touch them.

My assual ghost may slip,  
Issuing tip-toe, from the pure inhuman;  
The tissues of my lip  
Will bruise your eyelids, while I am a woman.

Elinor Wylie

From Black Armour -- bits of

Peregrine

Liar and beggar  
He had no friend  
Except a dagger  
And a candle-end.

• • • • •  
He sp̄oke this sentence  
With a princely air:  
"The noose draws tighter;  
This is the end;  
I'm a good fighter,  
But a bad friend;  
I've played the traitor  
Over and over;  
I'm a good hater,  
But a bad lover."

Elinor Wylie

Sheltered Garden

I have had enough.  
I gasp for breath.

Every way ends, every road,  
every foot-path leads at last  
to the hill-crest--  
then you retrace your steps,  
or find the same slope on the other side,  
precipitate.

I have had enough--  
border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies,  
herbs, sweet-cress.

O for some sharp ~~wish~~ of a branch--  
there is no scent of resin  
in this place,  
no taste of bark, of coarse weeds,  
aromatic, astringent--  
only border on border of scented pinks.

Have you seen fruit under cover  
that wanted light--  
pears wadded in cloth,  
protected from the frost,  
melons, almost ripe,  
smothered in straw?

Why not let the pears cling  
to the empty branch?  
All your coaxing will only make  
a bitter fruit--  
let them cling, ripen of themselves,  
test their own worth,  
zipped, shrivelled by the frost,  
to fall at last but fair  
with a russet coat.

Or the melon--  
let it bleach yellow in the winter light,  
even tart to the taste--  
it is better to taste of frost--  
the exquisite frost--  
than of wadding and of dead grass.

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

Circe

It was easy enough  
to bend them to my wish,  
it was easy enough  
to alter them with a touch,  
but you  
adrift on the great sea,  
how shall I call you back?

Cedar and white ash,  
rock-cedar and sand plants  
and tamarind,  
red cedar and white cedar  
and black cedar from the inmost forest,  
fragrance upon fragrance  
and all of my sea-magic is for naught.

It was easy enough--  
a thought called them  
from the sharp edges of the earth;  
they prayed for a touch,  
they cried for the sight of my face,  
they entreated me  
till in pity  
I turned each to his own self.

Panther and panther,  
then a black leopard  
follows close--  
black panther and red  
and a great hound,  
a god-like beast,  
cut the sand in a clear ring  
and shut me from the earth,  
and cover the sea-sound  
with their throats,  
and the sea-roar with their own barks  
and bellowing and snarls,  
and the sea-stars  
with the swirl of the sand,  
and the rock-tamarinds  
and the wind resonance--  
but not your voice.

It is easy enough to call men  
from the edges of the earth.  
It is easy to summon them to my feet  
with a thought--  
It is beautiful to see the tall panther  
and the sleek deer-hounds  
circle in the dark.

It is easy enough  
to make cedar and white ash fumes  
into palaces  
and to cover the sea-caves

with ivory and onyx.

But I would give up  
rock-fringes of coral  
and the inmost chamber  
of my island palace  
and my own gifts  
and the whole region  
of my power and magic  
for your glance.

The sea shares "H.D."s interest with flowers, and her descriptions of it are no less accurate and vivid:

where rollers shot with blue  
cut under deeper blue.

Of a cliff, she says:

But you--you are unsheltered,  
cut with the weight of wind--  
you shudder when it strikes,  
then lift, swelled with the blast--  
you sink as the tide sinks,  
you shrill under hail, and sound  
thunder when thunder sounds.

Of a shore:

Wind rushes  
over the dunes,  
and the coarse, salt-crusted grass  
answers.