

IMAGISM & VORTICISM



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(1884-1972)

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The image has been defined as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." ...As a "critical" movement, the "Imagisme" of 1912 to '14 set out "to bring poetry up to the level of prose." ...Flaubert and De Maupassant lifted prose to the rank of a finer art, and one has no patience with contemporary poets who escape from all the difficulties of the infinitely difficult art of good prose by pouring themselves into loose verses. ...I believe that every emotion and every phase of emotion has some toneless phrase, some rhythm-phrase to express it. ...This belief leads to *vers libre* and to experiments in quantitative verse. ...The "image" is the furthest possible remove from rhetoric. Rhetoric is the art of dressing up some unimportant matter so as to fool the audience for the time being. ...Imagisme is not symbolism. The symbolists dealt in "association," that is, in a sort of allusion, almost of allegory. They degraded the symbol to the status of a word. They made it a form of metonymy. ...The symbolist's *symbols* have a fixed value, like numbers in arithmetic. ...The imagiste's images have a variable significance, like the signs a, b and x in algebra. Moreover, one does not want to be called a symbolist, because symbolism has usually been associated with mushy technique. On the other hand, Imagisme is not Impressionism, though one borrows, or could borrow, much from the impressionist method of presentation.

...Almost anyone can realize that to use a symbol with *an ascribed or intended meaning* is, usually, to produce very bad art. ...The Image is the poet's pigment. The painter should use his colour because he sees it or feels it...the author must use his *image* because he sees it or feels it, not because he thinks he can use it to back up some creed or some system of ethics or economics. An *image*, in our sense, is real because we know it directly. If it have an age-old traditional meaning this may serve as proof to the professional student of symbology that we have stood in the deathless light, or that we have walked in some particular arbour of his traditional paradiso, but that is not our affair. ...Dante's "Paradiso" is the most wonderful *image*. By that I do not mean that it is a perseveringly imagistic performance. The permanent part is Imagisme, the rest, the discourses with the calendar of saints and the discussions about the nature of the moon, are philology. The form of sphere above sphere, the varying reaches of light, the minutiae of pearls upon foreheads, all these are parts of the Image....

Three years ago in Paris I got out of a "metro" train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful woman, and I tried all that day to find words for what this had meant to me, and I could not find any words that seemed to

me worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion. And that evening, as I went home along the Rue Raynouard, I was still trying and I found, suddenly, the expression. I do not mean that I found words, but there came an equation...not in speech, but in little splotches of colour. It was just that--a "pattern," or hardly a pattern, if by "pattern" you mean something with a "repeat" in it. But I was unfamiliar with the kindergarten stories about colours being like tones in music. I think that sort of thing is nonsense. If you try to make notes permanently correspond with particular colours, it is like trying to narrow meanings to symbols. That evening, in the Rue Raynouard, I realized quite vividly that if I were a painter, or if I had, often, *that kind* of emotion, or even if I had the energy to get paints and brushes and keep at it, I might find a new school of painting, of "non-representative" painting, a painting that would speak only by arrangements in colour...

...Vorticism has been announced as including such and such painting and sculpture and "Imagisme" in verse. ...The Vorticist uses the "primary pigment." Vorticism is art before it has spread itself into flaccidity, into elaboration and secondary applications. ...All poetic language is the language of exploration. Since the beginning of bad writing, writers have used images as ornaments. The point of Imagisme is that it does not use images *as ornaments*. The image is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language. ...In the 'eighties there were symbolists opposed to impressionists, now you have vorticism, which is, roughly speaking, expressionism, neo-cubism, and imagisme gathered together in one camp and futurism in the other. Futurism is descended from impressionism. It is a spreading, or surface art, as opposed to vorticism, which is intensive. ...Vorticism is an intensive art. I mean by this, that one is concerned with the relative intensity, or relative significance of different sorts of expression. One desires the most intense, for certain forms of expression are "more intense" than others. ...The image is not an idea. It is a radiant node or cluster; it is what I can, and must perform, call a VORTEX, from which, and through which, and into which, ideas are constantly rushing. In decency one can only call it a VORTEX. And from this necessity came the name "vorticism." ...I am often asked whether there can be a long imagiste or vorticist poem. The Japanese, who evolved the *hokku*, evolved also the Noh plays. In the best "Noh" the whole play may consist of one image. I mean it is gathered about one image. Its unity consists in one image, enforced by movement and music. I see nothing against a long vorticist poem. ...On the other hand, no artist can possibly get a vortex into every poem or picture he does.