F. S. FLINT: IMAGISM'S QUIET REBEL

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ABSTRACT

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By

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The movement known as Imagism brought English and American poetry into the modern era, and its importance has been subject of several studies. Scholars have devoted most of their work to discussions of the ideas of T. E. Hulme, and the various activities of Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell. And rightly so. Hulme led the discussions of 1909-10 which provided the philosophical foundation for what was to become Imagism; Pound gave the movement its name, and his audacity and organizational ability put it across; Miss Lowell provided leadership and money during Imagism's salad days in 1915-17. But one member of the school, F. S. Flint, has never been the subject of a full study. Flint was the only poet to remain a member of the group from its vague beginnings to the very end. And it was through Flint that the Imagists received one of their strongest influences, French Symbolism. Lastly, Flint wrote some of the finest poems to be produced under the Imagist banner.

In this study, then, I tried to close a small gap in the history of modern literature. As the story of Imagism from Flint's point of view has never been recorded, I utilized the reminiscences of those who were involved in the school, paying particular attention to his own history of the

movement and to his ideas as to what it was about. My second major task was to investigate Flint's role as England's leading expert on French Symbolism and its successors, emphasizing his articles in various journals. Finally, I traced his artistic development, dealing mainly with the three books of poems he published in his lifetime.

The evidence thus gleaned presents a clear picture of Flint, both within the context of Imagism and without. He helped to initiate the early meetings with Hulme from which the general idea of Imagism sprang. His public urging that English poets take the rebellious French Symbolists as their examples helped to create the climate for such a movement. His studies of the French schools brought him into contact with the ideas of Henri Bergson and Paul Claudel, which greatly affected his own poems and those of others. And finally, his artistic works can be seen as evolving from derivitive, ordinary verse to imaginative, personal poems which moved far beyond the narrow, but vague, confines of Imagism itself.

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INTRODUCTION

During the first three decades of this century, several young writers, having detected the death rattle of poetry in England and America, set out to revive the victim. And revive it they did, in open defiance of academicians and established writers alike, and out of contempt for all those who promoted "Literature". Among the most important occurrences of those turbulent years was the brief banding together of several radical poets who formed the movement called Imagism. The Imagists were important because their movement, however loosely organized, was a deliberate, highly publicized change of direction away from Victorianism and toward modern poetry.

Although they were radicals, the Imagists did not shun tradition; they also brought in fresh air from such ancient sources as Provencal troubadors, haiku composers from Japan, and poets of ancient Greece. By far the most influential source, however, was a modern one: French Symbolism. With the possible exception of H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), all of the Imagist poets owed debts of varying sizes to the Symbolists and their successors. This is not to say that Imagism and Symbolism were interchangeable. On the contrary, there were important differences. According to William Pratt,

"The Symbolists used images as part of a poem; the Imagists thought of an image as a complete poem. The Symbolists tried for diffuseness and suggestiveness; the Imagists insisted on concentration and directness."[1] Among the writers who, according to Pratt, felt the influence of the school of Imagism, directly or indirectly, were T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Richard Aldington, William Carlos Williams, Amy Lowell, D. H. Lawrence, and Archibald MacLeish (p. 12-13).

The roles of T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and Amy Lowell in formulating the philosophies of Imagism (there were several) have been studied in some detail. However, one equally important member of the school has been largely ignored: F. S. Flint. He was the first writer to openly proclaim the need for just such a movement as Imagism became. Flint, together with Hulme, organized the seminal early meetings which attracted Pound and others in 1909, and he was on hand for the final blaze of glory under the leadership of Miss Lowell in 1917. Thus he was the only Imagist to see both the beginning and the end of the movement. Further, Flint was the foremost expert in England on the subject of contemporary French letters; he introduced Hulme to French poetry; his conversations with Pound greatly increased the American's knowledge of and enthusiasm for the Symbolists and their successors, and he also acted as Miss Lowell's tutor on the same subject. Finally, Flint was a fine poet in his own right, although his career was brief.

Strangely, Flint has never been the subject of a complete study; instead, his contributions have in the main been recognized only in general works on Imagism, or in the reminiscences of his fellow poets. Typical of the latter is Herbert Read's "Flint had far more to do with the development of the Imagist school than has generally been recognized."[2] René Taupin's scholarly L'influence du symbolism français sur la poésie américaine (de 1910 à 1920) and LeRoy C. Breunig's "F. S. Flint, Imagism's 'Maître d'Ecole'" (Comparative Literature, Spring, 1952), remain the only works which offer assessments of some aspects of Flint's activities as proselytizer for his French contemporaries. The most complete study of Flint's poetry was written in January, 1921 for the English Review by May Sinclair. Nothing of note has been printed since.

Neither has Flint been the subject of a thorough biography, and he left few personal anecdotes other than those which appeared in the journals for which he wrote. In his Imagism and the Imagists, the first full-length study of the movement, Glenn Hughes provided the following biographical details, gleaned in conversations with Flint:

> F. S. Flint was born in London /Islington/, December 19, 1885, the son of a commercial traveler. The family was in poor financial circumstances, and the boy's early years were spent amid actual squalor. He attended common school until he was thirteen and one-half years of age, when, by virtue of passing special examinations, he was allowed to terminate his "official" education six months ahead of the legal requirement. He then went to work for his living, and for several years took any odd job that came his way. Part of the time he worked in a warehouse.

> When he was about seventeen he began buying books from the street stalls, and one day he happened to acquire along with other bargains a volume of Keats's poems. Immediately a new world was opened to him--a world as thrilling as the one which Keats himself beheld in Chapman's Homer. His life, which till then had been so dirty, and, as he says, so "fleabitten", came now under the spell of beauty, and it was in this first lyric intoxication that he began composing poems of his own.[3]

According to an obituary in The Times (London), Flint was admitted to the Civil Service when he was nineteen. He entered night school, concentrating on languages. He rapidly became almost bilingual in French. He was never able to escape the fear of poverty, and he remained with the government until 1951, when he retired as chief of the Overseas Section, Statistics Division, Ministry of Labour. At that time he was awarded the Imperial Service Order. During his lengthy career he had taken part in many delegations to study foreign labor conditions, learning to speak Italian, Spanish, German, and Russian in the process. When he died in Berkshire on February 28, 1960, he had long stopped writing poetry. His actual output of verse ceased in 1920, when the death of his first wife left him "so utterly disoriented that he wrote virtually nothing of moment thereafter."[4] He continued to review verse as late as 1932, most notably in T. S. Eliot's journal, Criterion. He also translated and published a few minor German and French works.

Such are the bare details of the life of F. S. Flint, of whom Richard Aldington said, "He was possessed of an almost imbecile modesty" (Hughes, p. 166). Poetry and the

world of letters comprised Flint's dream world. Because of financial responsibilities, he was never able to devote his full life to that which he loved most. But during those few years he was actively engaged in writing and theorizing about poetry, he contributed a great deal to what would become modern verse.

This study will concern itself with Flint's contributions in three areas:

1) His role in the founding of the movement known as Imagism, special emphasis being placed on his understanding of Imagism's history, theory, and practice;

2) Flint's important studies of contemporary French poets, the investigation concentrating on his articles in various journals, and the effect his studies had on his own poetics; and

3) Flint's development as a poet, special attention being given to form and content.

Notes

[1]William Pratt, The Imagist Poem (New York: Dutton, 1963), pp. 12-13.

[2]Herbert Read, The Contrary Experience (London: Faber, 1963), p. 175.

[3]Glenn Hughes, Imagism and the Imagists (Stanford, 1931), p. 10. Referred to hereinafter as Hughes.

[4]Obituary, The Times, London, 29 February, 1960, p. 14a, col. 1.

I

Imagism: Flint's Version

In 1908, F. S. Flint was twenty-three years old. He had been working in the British Civil Service for four years, writing poems in his spare time. Now he took on another, part-time job, that of verse reviewer for A. R. Orage's socialist journal, New Age. His early comments foreshadowed the attitudes he was later to take during the days of Imagism. For example, in speaking of Francis Thompson, recently deceased, Flint was already concerned with simplicity of expression and honesty of emotion:

> Skill of word and splendour of imagery serve the emotion, the imagination and the thought in what they have to say to us; but it is in the novelty of what these three have to say, and principally in what the first two have to say, together with the degree of artistry brought to their expression, that presumably the greatness of a poet lies. The poet thus looks through a kind of telescope of four sections, which he sweeps round on life. Francis Thompson, I think, was only novel in expression and imagery. In emotion he seems to have been equal and austere. . . . And the reason for this seems to lie in Thompson's very excellences. His imagination was always at the mercy of that "wassail of orgaic imageries" whose novelty took away the breath of his critics; so that his greatness in one direction obscured his whole vision, just as the view would be obscured if only one section of a telescope were pulled out. . . . I think Thompson would have achieved more had he been more simple. He was too prodigal of word and image and not careful enough of rhythm; his expression in becoming involved stifled his emotion; and his imagination nearly always was hardly distinguishable from mere imagery.[1]

In other New Age articles, Flint called for a "revaluation of all poetical values". A typical column praised

Edward Storer because he "makes war on all poetic conventions. . . even rhyme is only admitted on sufferance as an occasional embellishment". The only real poetry, according to Flint, was the verse libre "--heroic blank verse cut up and phrased accordingly to the flow of the emotion and the exercise of the sixth sense--". The same review praised Lawrence Binyon for his choice of subject matter: "Not the form makes poetry, but the content; and descriptive verse like 'Red Night in London Visions' becomes poetry by the atmosphere it creates, impossible in prose." And regularly in his reviews, Flint managed to sound his favorite call: "Our poets once went to France with disastrous results; but there is much, I think, to be learned there now--and in Ireland" (Nov. 26, p. 96-7).

Flint began to call openly for a marriage of verse libre, which he had studied exhaustively out of passion for French poetry, and "a form of expression like the Japanese, in which an image is the resonant heart of an exquisite moment"[2]. Flint had reviewed translations of Japanese poems which had begun to gain popularity in the Occident. Most of the poems were tanka of thirty-one syllables arranged 5-7-5-7-7, or haiku of seventeen syllables set at 5-7-5. Curtis Hidden Page, who had also translated contemporary French poetry, explained the technical aspects of Japanese verse thus:

> Accent and rhyme, the chief elements that make verse to an English ear, do not exist in Japanese. Variations of quantity, time, or length of

> syllables, which make verse in Latin and Greek, and which the English ear can at least partly appreciate, are also absent; so-called long syllables do exist, but they are in fact the contraction of two syllables into one, and are still felt and counted as two syllables in verse. Rhyme is practically impossible, because every syllable (except a few contracted ones) ends in a vowel; now there are only five vowels, and no dipthongs, so there could be only five rhymes in all, in the language. Stress-accent does not exist, or let us say, is even lighter than in French. So, as in French, the basis of the verse is number of syllables; not, however, as in French or Chinese, a repetition of the same number or of symmetrically related numbers from line to line, with division of each line into identical or closely related number-groups; but a regular alternation of different numbers, which are, again unlike the French, always uneven and unfactorable numbers. The one almost universal form of verse in Japanese is made up of alternating lines of five and seven syllables.[3]

Japanese poetry, according to Kenneth Rexroth, "depends first of all on the subtlety of its effects. It is a poetry of sensibility." The prefaces of the longer tanka, for instance, create a setting for the last two lines. "Very often," said Rexroth, "these prefaces have only an emotional or metaphorical relevance, and introduce . . . an element of dissociation much like that found in modern French verse."[4] Flint, thinking he saw a similar effect in Storer's poems, later called his Mirrors of Illusion "the first book of Imagist poems" (It should be noted that the poems preceded the term "Imagist".). As an example, Flint, in his "History of Imagism", quoted from Storer's book a short piece called "Image":

> Forsaken lovers
> Burning to a chaste white moon,
> Upon strange pyres of loneliness and drought.[5]

Perhaps an aficionado of Japanese poetry would not call Storer's effort "Japanese", as it contains too many syllables to be a true haiku, and is far from being subtle; but it is close in spirit to the French Symbolists, and it made Flint's point about the possibility of a wedding between French and Japanese techniques. Flint published his personal regrets that Storer had abandoned the experiment ("History", p. 70).

Such was Flint's public position before his fateful meeting with T. E. Hulme. Oddly enough, what brought Flint and Hulme together was a public disagreement. On February 11, 1909, Flint, in his New Age column, attacked the Poet's Club, and thus indirectly insulted Hulme, its secretary. The occasion of the attack was the publication by the club of a plaquette of verse called For Christmas MDCCCCVIII. In reviewing the volume, and another by clubmember F. W. Tancred (Poems), Flint compared the club with the groups surrounding two of his personal heroes, Mallarmé and Verlaine:

> I have before me the two volumes of Poètes d' Aujourd'hui and two little plaquettes of verse by members of the Poets' Club--almost an antithesis, but not quite. Poètes d'Aujourd'hui is the flower of thirty or more years' conscious and ardent artistic effort, the work of pioneers, iconoclasts, craftsmen, and artists who fought for their art against ridicule, who chose even ludicrous names to isolate themselves in their art, and who listened week by week to the noble phrases and philosophies of the Maître, Stéphane Mallarmé. But the Poets' Club is apparently a dining-club and after-dinner discussion association. Evening dress is, I believe, the correct uniform; and correct persons--professors, I am told!--lecture portentously to the band of happy and replete rhymesters--and one or two poets, accidentals.

Flint found the work of Lady Margaret Sackville to be "almost the only poetry" produced by the club's members, bestowing but faint praise on the work of a few others, including "the quaint conceit of 'Autumn', by Mr. T. E. Hulme". He then delivered his final shot:

> I think of this club and its after-dinner ratiocinations, its tea-parties, in "suave South Audley Street"; and then of Verlaine at the Hotel de Ville, with his hat on the peg, as a proof of his presence, but he himself in a café hard by with other poets, conning feverishly and excitedly the mysteries of their craft--and I laugh. Those discussions in obscure cafés regenerated, remade French poetry; but the Poets' Club--! We look on poetry as the highest art; not music, because music must be phrased before it can appeal as poetry does; not sculpture, though the visible embodiment of beauty; not painting, which is decorative, mainly; not though all these three take overtones from the rest; but poetry, wherein the whole imaginable universe lives--mirrored in the pool of our being, which is stirred by the wind of our emotions--and is expressed in the living beauty of words and symbols and the strange beauty of individuality, which men have imposed on Nature and called Art. The Poets' Club is death (p. 327).

Flint's attack, while commendable in its zeal for poetry in general and French poets in particular, nevertheless displayed deficient logic: no cause-and-effect relationship between bad poetry and upper class clubs, and between good poetry and Bohemianism has been proven to exist. The review was an ill-advised shot from the hip at an obscure target. That Flint was later to single out "Autumn" as one of the first "Imagist" poems added a dash of irony to the affair. Hulme replied in kind in a letter printed the following week, in which he accused Flint of being a belated Romantic (Feb. 18, 1909).

A. R. Jones, Hulme's biographer, recorded the next steps in the oftentimes strange relationship between the two men:

> This clash with Flint led very quickly to a firm friendship between them from which Hulme at least profited in a number of ways. The most important contribution which Flint made was to introduce Hulme to French Symbolist poetry. It was through Flint that Hulme was brought into contact with the contemporary French poetry and Hulme was quick to see how their example could help him and his fellow poets achieve that hardness, clarity, and restraint that he had already made the keystone of his Imagism.[6]

At this point it should be noted that Jones was at pains to prove that Hulme "in the spring of 1907 . . . had already conceived the salient features of the theory and practice of what came to be known as Imagism" (p. 277). The claim is interesting in view of the difficulty the Imagists themselves had later in defining a single theory and in agreeing to a definite practice; and it is downright amusing when it is remembered that a number of people wrote "imagist" poems without ever meeting with Hulme or his theory. What Hulme did was to organize a series of meetings during which the possibility of a movement in the French style was discussed; theory seemed to have been a hit-and-miss proposition. As Flint put it,

> . . . after Hulme had violently disagreed with the Poets' Club and had left it, he proposed that he should get together a few congenial spirits, and that we should have weekly meetings in a Soho restaurant. The first of these meetings, which were really the successors of certain Wednesday evening meetings, took place on Thursday, March 25, 1909. There were present, so far as I recall, T. E. Hulme, Edward Storer, F. W. Tancred, Joseph Campbell,

> Miss Florence Farr, one or two other men, mere vaguements in my memory, and myself. I think that what brought the real nucleus of this group together was a dissatisfaction with English poetry as it was then (and is still, alas!) being written. We proposed at various times to replace it by pure vers libre; by the Japanese tanka and haikai; we all wrote dozens of the latter as an amusement; by poems in a sacred Hebrew form, of which "This is the House that Jack Built" is a perfect model; Joseph Campbell produced two good specimens of this, one of which is printed in "The Mountain Singer"; by rhymeless poems like Hulme's "Autumn", and so on. In all this Hulme was ringleader. He insisted too on absolutely accurate presentation and no verbiage; . . . There was also a lot of talk and practice among us, Storer leading it chiefly, of what we called the Image. We were very much influenced by modern French symbolist poetry ("History", p. 70-71).

The above, written in 1915, contains only the vague "absolutely accurate presentation and no verbiage" in reference to Hulme's philosophy. Jones's explication of the theory is only slightly more enlightening. Hulme, a disciple of Henri Bergson, adapted the philosopher's ideas "in order to provide himself with a suitable language in which to order and propagate his conception of poetry and poetic language". Bergson had said that there are two ways of apprehending reality: the analytical (intellectual) method, and the intuitional (instinctive) method. Hulme began by assuming that there are also two kinds of language: prose, which is an essentially blunt instrument of communication, and poetry, which "is, or can be, a sensitive and individual instrument for communicating the unique, imaginative experience of the poet. Prose is the language of the intellect, a concept language; poetry is the language of intuition, an imagistic

language" (Notes, p. 277-78). In his Speculations, Hulme defined poetry still further:

> /Poetry/ is not a counter language, but a visual concrete one. It is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily. It always endeavors to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process. It chooses fresh epithets and fresh metaphors, not so much because they are new, and we are tired of the old, but because the old cease to convey a physical thing and become abstract counters. A poet says a ship 'coursed the seas' to get a physical image, instead of the counter word 'sailed'. Visual meanings can only be transferred by the new bowl of metaphor; prose is an old pot that lets them leak out. Images in verse are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language. Verse is a pedestrian taking you over the ground, prose--a train which delivers you at a destination.[7]

For the most part, almost any Imagist poet could live with Hulme's theory. His was nothing less than an attempt to return to classical verse, as H. D. was to do later, and as Matthew Arnold had done before. Perhaps the most important aspect of his poetics was the complete abandoning of rhyme and meter, and his hint at the need for an emotive language, a subject Flint himself was to take up in his studies of the French poets.

On April 22, 1909, Ezra Pound, whose Personae had just been published, joined the group at its regular meeting place, the Eiffel Tower, a restaurant in Soho:

> Dressed like the hero of Italian grand opera with his bright carroty beard waving, he read aloud his poem Sestina: Altaforte standing on a cafe table. He gave this monologue the full Browning Society treatment, roaring it out until the restaurant trembled and the waiters discreetly placed screens round the tables occupied by Hulme and his friends.

> Pound could hardly have been aware that this kind of behavior was calculated to arouse antagonism among a group of poets dedicated to restraint in poetry (Notes, p. 281-82).

As Flint remembered events, Pound could not be made to believe that there was any French poetry after Ronsard. "He was very full of his troubadors; but I do not remember that he did more than attempt to illustrate (or refute) our theories occasionally with their example" ("History", p. 71). Nevertheless, Pound and Flint became friends. Flint recognized in the American a kindred spirit, one who was willing to question much of what was then passing as poetry. Flint reviewed Pound's Personae a month after they had met in Soho. After praising him as "a rebel against all conventions except sanity", Flint assessed Pound's current status as a poet:

> Let us once and for all acknowledge what Mr. Pound owes to Browning, his mediaeval poets, mystics and thinkers, and, perhaps, a little to Mr. Yeats and Thompson; and take his poems as poetry, without reference to sources of raw material. I think there is sufficient craft and artistry, originality and imagination in "Personae" to warrant one in giving them high praise. Mr. Pound writes in a free form of verse that will not, I hope, lead him into the wastes. He is working toward a form that other English poets might study (New Age, May 27, 1909, p. 101).

Flint often visited Pound in his rooms, where the discussion generally revolved around the Symbolists and the schools that followed them. In her interesting and informative Ezra Pound's Kensington, Patricia Hutchins reconstructed the mood of those times in conversations with Flint in the 1950's, and in letters from Pound, whose wife read her book in proof:

> Among those Pound already knew in London was F. S. Flint, who had been introduced by another young man, T. E. Hulme. Unlike Hulme, he was without private means and had a job, also contributing poetry and criticism to various journals. At that time Pound had a good deal to learn from Flint's knowledge of French poetry.
>
> 'I remember Pound then', Flint laughed. 'He had a tuppenny ha'penny sort of room, the bed taking up most of the space, beside it a ruelle in which he received his visitors. Ezra used to sit on the bed and recite Arnaut Daniel, which sounded like Bantu clicks.'
>
> There seems to have been much affectionate abuse between them, and although he appreciated the poetry, Flint never took Pound's enthusiasms very seriously. 'I mean to say, you take analytics--' he would begin. At one time Flint saw a very fine copy of Tacitus in Pound's room and asked if he could read it, and Pound replied, 'I hope so!' Odd the things people remember after so many years; Flint noticed that Pound's socks needed mending and as he lived at home suggested he should get them done, but no--Pound refused.[8]

Thus it was that Flint became the French master for the second of Imagism's "founders".

The Eiffel Tower group had all but completely disbanded by the winter of 1911, probably because Hulme had extended his interest to include the aesthetics of almost every other art form. Storer, leader of the discussions about "the Image", had given up his explorations along those lines, much, as has already been stated, to Flint's regret. Then, in 1912, Pound provided the impetus for a genuine movement:

> In 1912 Mr. Pound published, at the end of his book Ripostes, the complete poetical works of T. E. Hulme, five poems, thirty-three lines, with a preface in which these words occur: "As for the future, Les Imagistes, the descendants of the forgotten school of 1909 (previously referred to as the 'School of Images') have that in their keeping." In that year, Pound had become interested in modern French poetry; he had broken away from

> his old manner; and he invented the term "Imagisme" to designate the aesthetic of "Les Imagistes" ("History", p. 71).

In the same year Pound was named European Editor for Poetry (Chicago). The journal's editor, Harriet Monroe, wrote a note on Imagism for the November issue, linking the school (which did not exist) with French verse as poets who tried to "attain in English certain subtleties of cadence of the kind which Mallarmé and his followers have studied in French". She also described them as "ardent Hellenists".[9] The reference to cadence is due to Flint, who had chosen the term "unrhymed cadence" to describe his own poems. The reference to Hellenism is traceable to H. D. and to Richard Aldington, whom Pound had just persuaded that they were Imagists. Both Aldington and H. D. were greatly interested in the Greek Anthology, and their poems fit into the broad Imagist scheme. In fact, with the appearance of her poems in the January, 1913 issue of Poetry, H. D. became the first "official" member of the new school; Pound had coerced her into signing them "H. D. Imagiste". Aldington revealed that Pound made his declaration after reading those first poems: "Ezra was so much worked up by these poems of H. D.'s that he removed his pince-nez and informed us that we were Imagists."[10] In fact, the evidence shows that Pound had seized upon the term as a catchall for the group of young poets he wished to promote. He launched the movement with the combination of audacity and carefully chosen publicity which only he could supply.

Flint was skeptical about the new movement, but he figured in Pound's next step. In August, 1912, Flint had written a monumental study of contemporary French poetry for Harold Monro's Poetry Review. He had urged that English poets take example from the French, and form themselves into an organized force for the improvement of the state of the art.[11] Meanwhile, Pound was holding regular discussions with Aldington and H. D. in a Kensington tea shop:

> Upon many points of taste and of predilection we differed, but agreeing upon these three positions, we thought we had as much right to a group name, at least as much right, as a number of French 'schools' proclaimed by Mr. Flint in the August number of Harold Monro's magazine for 1911 /sic/.[12]

The "three positions" Pound referred to have a strange history. They were first printed in Poetry, March, 1913, over Flint's signature:

> 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". The 'imagists' admitted that they were contemporaries of the Post Impressionists and the Futurists; but they had nothing in common with these schools. They had not published a manifesto . . . They had a few rules, drawn up for their own satisfaction only, and they had not published them. They were:
>
> 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.[13]

Both the holding up of Sappho, Catullus, and Villon as the best writers of all time and the use of such Frenchified

words as "Imagisme", "imagiste", and "snobisme" identify the source as Pound, not Flint. He would have chosen Emile Verhaeren as one of the best writers of all time, and he abhorred the pretentious adoption of foreign words when their English equivalents are just as clear and descriptive. Miss Hutchins told of talking with Flint on the subject of his "interview":

> F. S. Flint, during our talks at Harwell in the 'fifties', thought Imagism a young people's joke, not all that serious. He described how Pound arrived one day with 'an interview with himself' already written but Flint would not sign, so when Pound had left he re-arranged this and sent it back. Pound made further improvements.
>
> 'I have it here', Flint went over to the confusion of books below a window, unsorted since the move from Hampstead, and brought out two pages of typescript, the final article for America. . . . Certain poets were drawn in by the force of Pound's personality. It was necessary for him to have a banner and adherents. Flint and Pound, for instance, were to have some friendly tussles about various aspects later (Hutchins, p. 135-37).

Two things are clear as reflected in this episode: Flint was not "in" the movement as late as March, 1913, and his ideas of what constituted Imagism differed enough with Pound's so that some quarreling took place. According to Aldington, the original movement was going to be exceedingly minor; only Pound, H. D., and Aldington were to publish a book of poems. Pound changed his mind because "he was internationally famous while we were miserable unknowns, and that consequently the whole attention of the world's press would go to his poems, and ours would not even be noticed". Pound persuaded John Cournos and John Gould Fletcher to join the

movement, and then offered Flint's name to Aldington and H. D. "We liked F. S. Flint", Aldington said, "although the nearest he had got to Imagism was reading masses of young French poets and imitating Verlaine" (Aldington, p. 136). Pound later wrote to Glenn Hughes:

> Flint was the next acquisition, tho' really impressionist. He and Ford and one or two others should by careful cataloguing have been in another group, but in those far days there weren't enough non-symmetricals to have each a farm to themselves" (quoted in Notes, p. 268).

The book came out in 1914. Called Des Imagistes, it contained the work of eleven poets, including Pound, Aldington, H. D., Flint, Skipwith Cannell, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, James Joyce, Ford Madox Ford, Allen Upward, and John Cournos. Imagism was boldly launched, and already it had become so eclectic as to defy description under the Sappho-Catallus-Villon banner. Flint, who was neither a Verlaineist nor an impressionist, nevertheless fit well with the rest. The anthology was successful in America, but not in England. Pound soon developed another enthusiasm, and began to ignore Imagism for a new movement, Wyndham Lewis's "Vorticism".

In 1932, Flint, writing for T. S. Eliot's Criterion, assessed Pound's role in the founding of Imagism:

> Pound's friends admire him--within reason; but there is that in him which compels them to poke fun at him, and, at times, to want to kick him. He is the most irritating devil in the world. He has done one big thing. He invented Imagism, and, with Imagism, he changed the direction of and gave new life to American poetry. . . . Like most inventors, Pound did not create out of the void. The 'image' he took from T. E. Hulme's table talk. The 'ism' was suggested to him by the notes on

> contemporary French poetry which I wrote for Harold Monro's Poetry Review. The collocation of 'image' with 'ism' came to Pound after I had told him about Fernand Divoire's essays on 'stratégie littéraire'. Pound devised a 'stratégie littéraire'. It succeeded, and swept the American continent; but not until Pound, with his usual petulance, had deserted his child, and left it to a foster-mother, Amy Lowell.[14]

Flint's underlying anger, even at such a late date, is evident in his statement: Pound had never acknowledged his debts to either Hulme or Flint. Jones put it thus:

> Hulme and his friends tolerated Pound because of his obvious poetic ability and perhaps more important, because of his immense goodheartedness, but they all felt that Pound had taken over Hulme's poetic theories without sufficiently acknowledging their source, as, indeed, they felt he had taken over F. S. Flint's views of French Symbolism without acknowledging his indebtedness (Notes, p. 282).

In fairness to Pound it should be noted that neither Hulme nor Flint could have put across Imagism as a movement. Hulme was at heart a philosopher, and he soon lost interest in poetry per se. Flint apparently saw his role as being restricted mainly to calling for a movement in print, and waiting for one to occur. Pound made one occur. He convinced Harriet Monroe that a school existed when none did; he was wise enough to see the folly of adhering to verse in the classical Greek and Provencal modes. Thus, Imagism was made large enough to encompass both Flint and Joyce.

When Pound left Imagism to itself, Amy Lowell stepped in to fill the void as leader and chief financial support. She had taken part in the first Imagist anthology, over the objections of Aldington and H. D., who called her early

poems "fluid, fruity, facile stuff" they wished to avoid. However, their scruples began to disappear when they began to know her:

> It would have been difficult to resist that vivacious intelligence, and her conversion was obviously sincere. She lacked H. D.'s classical knowledge and taste, but she knew French better than any of us except Flint. He introduced her to a whole new generation of French writers, the foundation of her book on the subject (Aldington, p. 137).

Flint thus became the French tutor to Imagism's third leader. His relationship with Miss Lowell was more peaceful than his dealings with Pound. Under her leadership, but with the others acting as co-editors, the Imagists published three more anthologies, in 1915-16-17, which again enjoyed their major success in the United States. During those years, Flint was the "French lobby", Aldington speaking for Greece. When Aldington gave a general description of Imagism, something had been added: "Imagists seek the qualities that make Sappho, Catallus, Villon, the French Symbolists (whose influence still dominates all European poetry) great" (quoted by Stanley Coffman, p. 160). But Flint, according to Coffman, retained his independence:

> Flint and Fletcher, though both acquainted with Hulme and relatively unaffected by Pound's criticism, developed a theory and practice which does not resemble the doctrine preached by either (p. 181).

Flint's theory of unrhymed cadence received its fullest exposition in the Preface to Otherworld, a book of his poems published in 1920.[15] After declaring himself "not a scholar

in any sense", Flint nevertheless cited Chaucer and Cynewulf as precursors who used the term "cadence" much as he did:

> A nightingale is supposed to be singing the original early English of that poem /Riddle, The Nightingale/; but we are not pressing the words too closely, if we say that Cynewulf had in mind, when he used the words "a cadenced song"--whatever they may be in his English,--the form of his own poems, and that that form is the real tradition of English poetry, and that my own unrhymed cadences and those of other writers are, in fact, a reversion to that tradition (Preface, p. v-vi).

Flint carried his historical rummaging back even further when he declared that he had seen scansions of Greek choruses which showed that they were nothing less than cadences, "whatever the professors with their tabulated metres and complicated feet and lists of admitted exceptions may say" (p. vi). Flint saw the middle ages as a time of "freedom and technical exuberance" which lasted until Latin formalism became the ideal as history moved toward the Renaissance. Both rhyme and metre were reinvented as toys to show the ingenuity of poets "and neither has grown nor could grow with our needs, and . . . they now strangle and stifle the natural cadence of our emotions, which are the driving force beyond all poetic expression" (p. vii). Flint next attacked the common belief that to write in rhyme and metre is to "write in poetry', as the journalists-critics phrased it. "Perhaps the only real critic is the poet; perhaps criticism is poetry, as Oscar Wilde seems to have held; and perhaps this age is not rich in poets" (p. ix).

But if rhyme and metre do not indicate poetry, what does? Is there a difference between poetry and prose? Not surprisingly, Flint called upon his French poets for his answer:

> But I do not believe this, because, really, as Mallarmé said, there is not prose, except in advertisements (and even there!); and all our best prose writers are poets, who, somewhat like M. Jourdain, have been writing prose . . . poetry all their lives without knowing it. Some of them, at the end of a long career, have taken to verse, as though they had not been the poets they are ever since they began using their pens to artistic purpose! What second childishness drives them to abandon the noble cadences of their prose for the hurdy-gurdy tunes of rhyme and metre? Why do others, in the fullness of their powers, turn aside from time to time to do exercises in this wornout form, exercises that are cold and artificial and narrow and stiff beside the free grace and breadth and power of their prose, that prose which, as M. André Suarès, in his essay to Charles Peguy, says, is "the form . . . of our time and our own proper creation, a form which is neither prose nor verse, but rather both together" (p. x).

Flint believed that such was the natural outcome of a European culture tired of the "trickeries and acrobatics which satisfied its forefathers;" that the European demanded "a more flexible form of expression in which the word would, to use Flaubert's phrase, be glued tight to the thing" (p. x). For true poets there are two forms, really one, prose, and what he called unrhymed cadence:

> The one merges into the other; there is no boundary line between them; but prose, generally, will be used for the more objective branches of writing--for novels, plays, essays and so on--and poetry in this form is accepted with so much good-will that I have some misgiving in applying to it its rightful name; cadence will be used for personal, emotional, lyric utterances, in which the phrasing goes with a stronger beat and the words live

> together with an intenser flame. If you ask why cadence should not be printed as prose, the reply is that the unequal lines mark the movement of the cadence and its tempo" (p. xi-xii).

The Preface ended with Flint's statement that "the artistic form of the future is prose, with cadence--a more strongly accented variety of prose in the older English tradition--for lyrical expression" (p. xii).

In 1920, Flint published an article in the Monthly Chapbook dealing further with his views on cadence. Originally intended to examine the work of ten poets on the basis of Flint's poetics axioms, the article instead dwelt on the work of H. D. and of J. C. Squire. Flint began by listing fourteen rules, many of them pithy renderings of certain points in the Preface. The first four axioms declared the relationship between personality, style, and sincerity, all three qualities being necessary for good poetry to be written:

> 3.
>
> Personality in art is the character given to a work of art by the refraction of life through an uncommon mind, the artist's.
>
> Style in writing is the character given to it by the selection of word and phrase rendering as exactly as possible the idea, emotion and vision of the artist, and by the rejection of everything foreign and superfluous.
>
> Sincerity in writing is the conjunction of personality and style.[16]

In the ninth and tenth axioms, Flint talked about cadence and rhythm, after first insisting that there is no difference of kind between prose and verse. Free verse is a misnomer; because it has no measure it should be called cadence:

> Cadence differs in no way from prose. Its rhythm is more strongly felt, and it is printed in lines of varying length in order that this rhythm may be marked. But there is no justification for printing prose in this way, except to point to a definite rhythmic intention. . . . Rhythm is the succession of strong and weak beats in a speech. In measured verse, this succession is regulated according to a scheme, from which slight departures are allowed for the sake of variation. . . . In cadence, or prose, the strong and weak beats of speech fall into a natural order, and the stronger the impulse of the writer, the more marked will the rhythm be. This may also be said in a less degree of metrical writing; but in the latter, the metre is always there to be juggled with as well (p. 18).

Flint's poetics differs greatly with that of Hulme, his early confrere. Hulme insisted on two kinds of language, which differ in their sources and in their purposes. Prose arises in the intellect, poetry in the intuition. Prose is used to deal with concepts, poetry with the "visual concrete". Coffman assessed Hulme's theory:

> The feelings Hulme wanted poetry to express were the minor, transient ones, almost trivial ones which result from seeing physical things in an unconventional way . . . 'a transitory artificial impression is deliberately cultivated into emotion and written about'. . . Hulme tends to reduce poetry almost to the creation of bons mots. Convinced of man's ineffectiveness as a seer who can reveal the mystery of the universe, Hulme insisted that he turn his eyes from searching the horizon to examine the limited area around his feet (p. 63).

Flint counted heavily upon emotion for his theory, large emotions and sincerity; he insisted on the inseparability of prose and poetry (recall the quotation from Mallarmé about advertisements and Flint's "and even there!". It is as if their original assessments of each other were correct:

Hulme, the classicist, Flint, the romantic. Flint's theories, always stated in the most general terms, clearly stamp him as an independent among the Imagists. His ideas about cadence accurately predicted the future of the artistic use of language: the Imagist Anthology of 1930 contained excerpts from Finnegans Wake.[17]

Notes

[1]F. S. Flint, "Book of the Week", New Age, October 29, 1908, p. 13.

[2]F. S. Flint, "The History of Imagism", The Egoist, May 1, 1915, p. 70, hereinafter known as "History".

[3]Curtis Hidden Page, Japanese Poetry (Boston: Houghton, 1923), pp. 17-18.

[4]Kenneth Rexroth, One Hundred Poems from the Japanese (New York: New Directions, 1964), pp. ix and xv.

[5]Edward Storer, Mirrors of Illusion (London: Sisle, 1908), p. 1.

[6]A. R. Jones, "Notes toward a History of Imagism", South Atlantic Quarterly, LX (Summer, 1961) p. 280, hereafter known as Notes.

[7]T. E. Hulme, Speculations (New York: Harcourt, 1924), pp. 134-35.

[8]Patricia Hutchins, Ezra Pound's Kensington (London: Faber, 1965), p. 56.

[9]Quoted by Stanley K. Coffman, Jr., Imagism: a Chapter for the History of Modern Poetry (Norman: U. of Oklahoma Press, 1951), p. 8.

[10]Richard Aldington, Life for Life's Sake (New York: Viking, 1941), p. 135.

[11]F. S. Flint, "Contemporary French Poetry", The Poetry Review, August, 1912, pp. 355-414.

[12]Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect", in T. S. Eliot, ed. Literary Essays of Ezra Pound (New York: New Directions, 1968), p. 3.

[13]F. S. Flint, "Imagisme", Poetry (Chicago), March, 1913, p. 250.

[14]F. S. Flint, "Verse Chronicle", The Criterion, July, 1932, p. 686-87.

[15]F. S. Flint, Otherworld (London: Poetry Bookshop, 1920), pp. v-xii.

[16]F. S. Flint, "Presentation", The Monthly Chapbook, March, 1920, p. 17.

[17]Glenn Hughes, ed. The Imagist Anthology 1930, (New York: Covici, 1930), pp. 177-79.

II

The French Revolution

What was there about France that she seethed with artistic activity while England grew grayer? Was it French political instability? Social unrest? Madness? Why was the turbulent Age of Dreyfus poetically superior to the peaceful Edwardian Era? In 1909, F. S. Flint was asking such questions because "English poetry at this hour is deliquescent. There is no unity of inspiration; the little winds blow fitfully in all directions. . . ."[1] He did not have the answers to those questions (and neither did anyone else), but he offered his fellow English poets a solution: take the French poets, particularly the Symbolists and their successors, as examples; experiment, rebel, abandon all useless conventions. Flint set as his goal, in his New Age articles and elsewhere, to help spark a revolution in English poetry. Ultimately, such a revolution occurred, and Flint, while not its leader, was in the thick of battle longer than anyone else. His role as a member of the rebellion known as Imagism has already been discussed. Of perhaps greater personal importance to Flint, however, was his public passion for French poetry. He had been a student of French literature, and he became an enthusiast. Glenn Hughes was to write in 1931 that Flint's "knowledge of French (which he can write fluently in either prose or verse) is probably unsurpassed in England".[2] As a

critic for the New Age, he felt disheartened when he compared the products of chaotic France with those of complacent England. And he said as much:

> I should like to agree with Mr. /G. K./ Chesterton, who writes in the introduction to Mr. Darrel Figgis's Vision of Life that "there are signs of a certain stirring in English poetry, a minor Renaissance of which Francis Thompson may be regarded as the chief example". I have on my right had a long row of refutations of Mr. Chesterton. . . ." (New Age, Aug. 5, 1909, p. 288).

Flint's first major article for the New Age (July 8, 1909) studied the poetics of Remy de Gourmont. Flint began by characterizing Gourmont's work as "astonishing in its diversity and complexity, in beauty and profundity, in the keen cleftage of old associated ideas and subtle evocation of new". They were also important because Gourmont was "a chief" in the movement called Symbolism, in which a few young writers deliberately broke with tradition. De Gourmont was a liberator:

> A liberator? . . . Yes. In the preface to the second volume of Le Livre des Masques he writes "we have no longer any principles, and there are no more models; a writer creates his aesthetic in creating his work; we are reduced to making an appeal to sensation rather /than/ to the judgment. In literature as in everything, must cease the reign of abstract words." . . . It is impossible to pass through these books without feeling that new eyes and a new understanding are being given to one; old images and metaphors are broken up and made useless; associations that have grown mouldy are crumbled; and fresh with the dew of a new morning the earth again awaits the re-born artist (p. 219).

Flint believed Gourmont to have been a prime example of the freedom-giving artist, especially with regard to language.

But the Symbolist, aside from his preoccupation with the word, or rather, because of it, must also look at life. De Gourmont had the ability to "turn over the cube of life and show the sixth side, which he alone till then had seen". What he saw aroused irony and sarcasm in him, but, according to Flint, "only the perversions and acidities of moral-howling monkeys, pedants, and schoolmasters" aroused his bitterest sarcasms. Flint found the pivot of Gourmont's philosophy in his Physique de l'Amour, essay sur l'instinct sexual:

> He sees life, essentially, as the necessity to procreation, try to disguise it how we may; and art is one of the forms of the sexual instinct. This book is a combination of his readings and reflexions from his own observations over the whole animal kingdom of beasts, birds, insects and fishes. It is the work of an artist and poet, looking through the cool eyes of a scientist (p. 219).

In summing up, Flint called Gourmont a creative skeptic, that is, one who is both analytical and synthetic: "To be capable of synthesis, one must have a sensitiveness always offered with joy to the vibrations of the world." Virtue is nothing less than to be happy, according to Flint. And he asked the Great Question when discussing the greatest pleasures, which are "sensual":

> Why has this word a sense of opprobrium? Perhaps because you have looked beyond the stars, and all pleasure has come to seem illicit, and work--really a sad necessity--the supreme idol (p. 219).

The pleasures of life come to those who are free, and liberty, according to Gourmont, is "an interior joy".

De Gourmont was important to Flint for several reasons. First, he was an open rebel against the stagnant art of his time, a time very much like Flint's own in England. Second, Gourmont saw restrictions on literature as being symptoms of restrictions on life itself. Those who hold to rules for their own sake deny the natural man his right to live. Third, a man has a duty to himself, which led Flint to admonish:

> Be instinctive, be happy according to your nature, but not anti-social. King Pausole, of Pierre Louys's novel, reduced his code to two laws:
> I. Do no harm to your neighbor.
> II. Understand this well, then do as you like (p. 219).

In another article for the New Age, Flint revealed his admiration for Emile Verhaeren, a Belgian poet whose style was reflected in some of Flint's own early poems. At that time (August 5, 1909) Verhaeren was, according to Flint, no less than the greatest of poets writing French:

> /He is/ the singer of the whole of Flanders, of the Illusory Villages, the Tentacular Towns, and the Hallucinated Countrysides, and of the Multiple Splendour and the Tumultuous Forces--briefly, the orgiastic choirmaster of the whole epopee of humanity. . . . (p. 288).

Verhaeren, even at his most experimental, did not abandon all of the conventions of French verse. His most important contribution for Flint was the emphasis he placed on rhythm. According to P. Mansell Jones, Verhaeren never quite gave up rhyme, and he relied on the alexandrine for his greatest effects. "His own rhythms he called 'dynamic' and also 'onomatopoetic'." He used rhyme to accentuate rhythm. "The final aim of his experiments . . . was to recapture and to

reproduce . . . that universal rhythm to which he imagined the primitive mind had been most keenly sensitive."[3]

Flint's reading of Verhaeren led him to study further the aims of Symbolism itself. In another column for the New Age (September 30, 1909), he discussed the school and its outlook on life. Symbolism was really a way of looking at life:

> In literature it brought about a deep discontent with and rebellion against the old poetry which described, or taught, or persuaded, or invectivated, or simply talked. It was an individualistic movement and a claim by the artist to be bound by no other rules than those of his own personality and of the universe which he reflected. It sought to reflect infinity be evocation and echo, infinity being an emotion of the poet. . . . The Romantics were content to tell a story, the Parnassians impassibly to describe; but the Symbolist--and all essential poets are symbolists--takes a pure emotion and translates it by eternal images which become symbolical of man's everlasting desires and questionings (p. 412).

Flint's authority in such matters was Tancrede de Visan, who had declared the philosophy of Symbolism was formulated by Henri Bergson. Flint had read Bergson's Introduction to Metaphysics (1903) and was impressed by it. Therefore, in order to understand much of Symbolism, and indeed, Flint, it will be necessary to look briefly at Bergson's work.

A poet would need no better recommendation for Bergson's philosophy than Bertrand Russell's piqued assessment that "his imaginative picture of the world, regarded as a poetic effort, is in the main not capable of either proof or disproof".[4] In the Introduction to Metaphysics, Bergson posited two kinds of knowledge: relative and absolute. Relative

knowledge is arrived at from outside the object, through analysis. It depends upon the point of view at which we stand and on the symbols with which we express ourselves. Absolute knowledge is arrived at by entering into the object through intuition. It therefore depends neither on the point of view nor on symbols.[5] Using the metaphor of a character in a novel, Bergson said that no matter how many details the author gives, no matter how many points of view he provides, no matter how many symbols he uses, we are still outside the character; symbols can only give us what he has in common with others, not what belongs to him and to him alone. All we can get is the relative; only coincidence with the character himself can give us the absolute (p. 22).

The absolute can only be given in an intuition, while everything else falls within the province of analysis. Intuition is the intellectual sympathy by which we place ourselves within the object in order to coincide with what is unique and inexpressible in it (pp. 23-24). Positive science has analysis as its function. If there is any way of possessing a reality absolutely without using expression, translation, or symbolic representation, that method is metaphysics: "metaphysics, then, is the science which claims to dispense with symbols" (p. 24).

The only reality we can seize from within by intuition "is our own personality in its flowing through time--our self which endures". When we contemplate ourselves, we penetrate through the surface layer of perceptions which come

from the material world. Next, we notice the memories which adhere to these perceptions, and which interpret them. These memories have been detached from the depths of the personality "drawn to the surface by the perceptions which resemble them". Lastly, we feel the stir of tendencies and motor habits, "a crowd of virtual actions, more or less firmly bound to these perceptions and memories". But as we penetrate even further, we discover a continuous flux; which is a succession of states, "each of which announces that which follows and contains that which precedes it. . . . In reality, no one of them begins or ends, but all extend into each other" (pp. 24-25). What we discover is the flowing of our personality, a ceaselessly changing process--"duration" (durée) or pure time (Becoming). "The inner life is all this at once: variety of qualities, continuity of progress, and unity of direction. It cannot be represented by images" (p. 27).

The following section was of immediate relevance to the poet, and deserves full quotation:

> 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 very 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 them 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. By providing that, in spite of their differences of aspect, they all require from the mind the same kind of attention, and in some sort the same degree of tension, we shall gradually accustom

> consciousness to a particular and clearly-defined disposition--that precisely which it must take up in order to appear to itself as it really is, without any veil (p. 27-28).

Bergson seems to have advocated a technique very much like that of the dialectic, where thesis and antithesis commingle to form a synthesis.

Much of what Bergson meant can be seen as relevant for the poet when we look at Flint's monumental study for the August, 1912 Issue of Poetry Review. Harold Monro, editor of that journal, had noted Flint's reputation as an expert on French literature, and turned over to him an entire issue. "Contemporary French Poetry" was the most complete work yet done on the subject.[6] Flint attempted to be completely objective, putting together a survey of a dozen schools which competed for attention in the chaos that was the French literary scene. Despite his attempt to be objective, it is easy to see that Flint betrayed some of his enthusiasm.

He began the study by asserting that France's poetic vitality was due to the constant state of political turmoil that had rocked the country from the time of the revolution. The French mind was kept in a constant state of excitation "wherein it was impossible for the spirit to vegetate and moulder". The result for literature was that school followed school, each denying its forerunners and being denied in turn. And then came Symbolism:

> What was symbolism? First of all, a contempt for the wordy flamboyance of the romanticists; secondly, a reaction against the impassive descriptiveness of the parnassians; thirdly, a disgust of the

> 'slice of life' of the naturalists. Ultimately, it was an attempt to evoke the subconscious element of life, to set vibrating the infinity within us, by the exquisite juxtaposition of images. Its philosophy . . . was the philosophy of intuitiveness: it has been formulated by Bergson (p. 355).

Two things in Flint's statement stand out: First, he talked about Symbolism in the past tense, as if it no longer existed. As he was to show, Symbolism had caused a veritable explosion of schools and counterschools. Like Imagism to come, Symbolism was really a group of individualists. Second, he credited Bergson with formulating the philosophy of Symbolism in such a way as to make it appear that Bergson's work was done either after or concurrently with the arising of the school. We have seen that Bergson's Metaphysics was not published until 1903, and Flint gave 1885 as the birth date of Symbolism. Marcel Raymond, in his informative history From Baudelaire to Surrealism, said that while "the analogies between the works of Bergson and those of the poets testify to a kinship" between his metaphysics and literature, they do not "warrant the conclusion that they are related as cause and effect". Bergsonism, "which was auscultation of the self before it turned to the universe", developed along a curve parallel to that followed by poetry.[7]

But that was precisely Bergson's point: his metaphysics was poetry, and poetry, to the Symbolists, at any rate, was metaphysics. If we recall Bergson's definition of metaphysics as "the science which claims to dispense with

symbols", we arrive at the central paradox of Symbolism. Flint, agreeing with Visan, stated the problem thus:

> A symbol is a sign used in place of a reality, as in algebra; but the symbolist poet attempts to give you an intuition of the reality itself and of the forces, vague to us, behind it, by a series of images which the imagination seizes and brings together in its effort to insert (Bergson's word) itself into and express that reality, and to evoke at the same time the infinity of which it is the culminating point in the present. To convey these images, the symbol is necessary, and is a means of expression only. The word symbolism is badly chosen, therefore, if used to indicate an aesthetic; and well-chosen if used to describe the mechanics of its expression (p. 357).

Raymond noted that Visan, taking his cue from Bergson, had seen that the concrete language of a poem, giving an intense feeling of reality, gives us an insight which far outstrips in authenticity the knowledge we get from concepts. The poet must not give up hope that, despite the inability of his images to be more than symbols, he can find, "not Being itself, but . . . something in which Being participates". Symbolist aesthetics, like Bergson's metaphysics, hopes to dispense with symbols. It repudiates the "indirect symbol, consciously elaborated, and invites the poet to approach naked nature and draw it into the flow of his images" (p. 117).

The Symbolists had sought a new vehicle for their insights, gave in to their inner lives, and found vers libre.

> But the Symbolists sought in their verse a variety, which the classic verse, a logic, which the romantic verse, a living flow of speech, rhythm, which the parnassian verse did not possess. Their element was the strophe, of not conventional form, composed of verses that were free from exterior

> law. But this vers libre was misnamed. It is by no means free; it must follow rigorously the interior law of the poet's emotion and the idea which has given it birth. . . . The vers libre is the most difficult form of all. Indeed, only when a poet's inspiration is upon him at its strongest, only when he is really under the influence of the strange bursting exaltation which goes with all creation, is he capable of vers libre. Then perhaps he will produce . . . emotional music (p. 358-59).

Vers libre became one of Flint's causes, one which he would argue in print and in private with his fellow Imagists. Rene Taupin discussed Flint's role in furthering the adoption of the technique in England:

> Mais de mon point de vue son importance est double: d'abord vers 1912, il était probablement l'Anglais qui connaissait le mieux la poésie française qu'on ecrivait alors, et c'est lui qui l'a fait connâitre a ses imagistes. Et puis, en étudiant les écoles et les théories verslibristes qui naissaient ou viellissaient alors en France, il a contribué à fonder une théorie vers libriste propre aux imagistes.[8]

Flint's Poetry Review study continued with the enumeration and descriptions of every major school in France. He noted that the Symbolists had liberated poetry for the new schools, and talked about some of their techniques: Jules Romains's 'rapport de sonorités', Georges Duhamel's 'rhythmic constant', and Henri Ghéon's 'analytical strophe'. In discussing Ghéon, Flint first showed interest in a possible answer to an interesting question: If neither rhyme nor meter was going to dictate the poetic line, what would? The Symbolists said that the state of emotion would dictate vers libre, but how would line length be dictated? Gheon had decided that the state of emotion also dictated breathing

patterns; therefore, his analytic strophe would reflect the breath patterns, the most "natural" rhythm of all. Flint quoted Robert de Souza to the effect that "strophe" was a poorly chosen word, since many "ideas, emotions, sentiments do not lend themselves easily to this passionate shortening of our breathing--since small rhythmic elements set apart by themselves demand stoppages" and renewed respiration; besides, there is a "natural physiological tendency to pronounce in one breath successive groups of rhythmic feet", so that the rhythmic unit should be called a verse (p. 363-64). Terminology aside, Flint found Ghéon's poems to have a very cunning rhythm. In his later studies of Paul Claudel, he would further pursue the matter of breathing.

In the following years Flint wrote the "French Chronicle" column for Poetry and Drama magazine. He came under the influence of Paul Claudel, whose plays he discussed in the first column he wrote for the magazine. He was particularly fascinated by the idea of cadenced speech, or "parole intelligible, which pours forth with the changing speeds of dramatic necessity, of which its beat has the strength".[9] The development of Claudel's thought "does not proceed by a logical dovetailing of phrases but by the accumulating of images and rendered visions", Flint said later. When these images and visions accumulate, what order do they follow? The answer consists in the physical act of speaking itself, the act of living itself: the act of breathing. As Flint explained it "the verse form Claudel uses for preference has

neither rhyme nor meter (it has measure and balance), and it is the act of breathing that regulates the end of a verse" (P and D, I, 4). We have noted Flint's interest in the analytical strophe of Gheon in the 1912 survey, but elsewhere in that article, Flint mentioned in a footnote an apparatus, invented by Abbé Rousselot, which "is in use at the Phonetics Laboratory of the College de France, and which regulates the duration of spoken syllables" (P. R., p. 358). It takes no great imagination to make the leap from individual syllable duration to individual breath patterns.

By way of comparison, we shall look at the later (1950) theory of Charles Olson, an American poet who was also influenced by the French schools. In a statement calling for the adoption of what he called Projective Verse, Olson said poetry must "put into itself certain laws and possibilities of the breath, of the breathing of the man who writes as well as of his listenings".[10] Olson suggested that the English had lost the secret of listening to the syllable when they became enamored of rhyme in Elizabeth's time. The syllable, he pointed out, is inextricably connected to the cadence of breathing. "I say a projective poet will /gō/ down through the workings of his own throat to that place where breath comes from, where breath has its beginnings, where drama has to come from, where, the coincidence is, all act springs" (p. 397).

Claudel, an intensely religious man (as only a former pagan can be religious), explained the link with breathing and language in mystical terms:

> The characteristic of man is his being endowed with spirit. To this word are linked the notions of "souffle" (breath), of the most subtle element, of movements independent of any matter submitted to the appreciation of senses, that is, of movement originating from a pure act of will. The existence and quality of a spirit is thus determined by the wish of the will which produced it, its simultaneous birth knowledge by the relationship it endows with its generation. . . . The act by means of which man certified the permanence of things, . . . by means of which he conceives of it in his heart and repeats the order which created it, is called speech. . . . Just as words are made out of vowels and consonants, our soul with each breath draws, from God, sonority and all its plentitude. To come to life would thus be for our soul to know, to be fully conscious. . . . The simplicity as well as the immense variety of the state of knowledge which will be the soul's, once it is separated from the body after death becomes thus apparent; the essential organ of this knowledge will be the double measure of consciousness expressed, during life, by breathing, heart-beats, the sharp and the flat, the short and the long syllables, the fundamental iambus of all language.[11]

Claudel, like Bergson, saw the poetic juxtaposition of images as a possible way toward the center, and the knowledge of Becoming. He was also one of those whom Flint classified as "visionaries, synthetists, dramatic", who created dramatic chant by "by rhythm, idea, and universalized conflicts" (P and D, I, 2). Universalized conflicts are realized by attempting to penetrate to the center and suddenly seeing life as it is conceived cosmically. Among the younger poets who followed Claudel in this respect was Henri-Martin Barzun, whose psychology of humankind Flint discussed

in his 1912 survey. Barzun said psychology developed in four stages: first the individual, where man conceives of himself as an entity; then the collective, where men become conscious of themselves as groups and nations; "then the human,--electricity having made humanity global;" and lastly, the universal, the realization that human life is but a feeble offshoot of universal life. From the universal, "by a natural return on himself", man returns to the conception of the individual enriched by many more points of contact with a life conceived cosmically" (P. R., p. 370). In summarizing Barzun's philosophy, Flint gave what amounted to a program for the post-Bergson poet:

> The philosophers . . . having led the way, a poet is now capable of revealing his multiple vision of the individual, in its vital relationships, instincts, pleasures, love; of the collectivity, in its elementary, aggregative relationships--appetites, interests, sentiments, religions; of the human, in its evident physical and biological solidarity (races, peoples, languages, countries)--in its conflicts, disasters, discoveries, destiny. And in the vast synthesis that M. Barzun has in mind, simple lyricism becomes absorbed by a manifold, superior lyricism: voices, presences, entities, crowds speak, and the poem becomes drama. With this conception, all the forms of poetry may be impregnated, renewed, magnified: novel, poem, epic, play, legend, mystery--every form. . . . The poet becomes the interpreter of the universal consciousness, the inspired bard, the supreme judge of the age; and his song changes from the monodic to the polyphonic, wherein life is dramatized psychologically by its multiple voices, the form being a long rhythmic melody, whose cadence, purely musical, is determined internally by the poetic emotion (P. R., p. 370-71).

This philosophy would have direct bearing on Flint's own career as a poet.

Flint continued as England's leading expert on French poetry; his last important work was an issue on Dada for the Chapbook in 1920. At age 35, Flint had serious doubts about the new youth movement. He believed the Dadaists had succumbed to the "common, human, vulgar desire to show off". Finally, he said they violated a supreme principle of the artist:

> It is useless to tell an artist he must renounce this or that; but it is legitimate to ask of him, if he wishes to communicate with his fellow men, that he accept the conventions by which he will make himself intelligible. This the Dadaists--and they are not alone--refuse to do. . . . But you are not doing any homage to the integrity of the mind by putting into words every idea that passes through your head, and offering that as a true image of your mind. It is like skimming the scum off the refining cauldron and offering that as a true image of your mind.[12]

By the time Flint's career as public proselyter for French poetry had ended, he was able to see almost as much vitality in England as he had observed across the Channel. While the British branch of the movement soon withered away, the American one prospered, and it owed no small measure of its vitality to the work of Flint, who fought for vers libre and convinced his fellow Imagists of its worth. But more importantly, his studies vastly changed his own poetry, which was at first largely derivitive, and later became intensely personal.

Notes

[1]F. S. Flint, "Verse", The New Age (London), August 5, 1909, p. 288.

[2]Glenn Hughes, Imagism and the Imagists (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1931), p. 154.

[3]P. Mansell Jones, Emile Verhaeren (Cardiff: U. of Wales Press, 1926), p. 68.

[4]Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945), p. 810.

[5]Henri Bergson, An Introduction to Metaphysics, trans. T. E. Hulme (Indianapolis: Liberal Arts Press, 1955, rpt., 1912), p. 21.

[6]F. S. Flint, "Contemporary French Poetry", Poetry Review, August, 1912, p. 355-414. Referred to later as P. R.

[7]Marcel Raymond, From Baudelaire to Surrealism (London: Peter Owen, 1957), p. 62-63.

[8]Rene Taupin, L'influence du symbolisme francais sur la poésie américaine (Paris: Champion, 1929), p. 128.

[9]F. S. Flint, "French Chronicle", Poetry and Drama, March, 1913, p. 82. Referred to later as P and D.

[10]Charles Olson, "Projective Verse vs. the Non-Projective", American Poetic Theory ed. Donald M. Allen (New York: Holt, 1972), p. 386.

[11]Paul Claudel, Poetic Art, trans. Renee Spodheim (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), p. 103-123.

[12]F. S. Flint, "The Younger French Poets", The Chapbook, November, 1920, p. 15.

III

Looking Outward

The poems of F. S. Flint, when studied in chronological order, reflect the vast change in technique that occurred when English poetry moved into the modern era. Flint's earliest poems, collected in his first book, In the Net of the Stars (1909), remained under the influence of Romanticism; they reveal that nothing much had changed in English verse since Wordsworth's time.[1] Thus, more than a century after the Preface to Lyrical Ballads, poetry followed a generally predictable course. With the advent of Imagism, however, the direction changed, often helter-skelter. If Imagism cannot be narrowly defined, or confined under anything other than a broad theory, it is because its poets, like the post-Symbolists in France, refused to ape anyone; they all had their enthusiasms, to which they all gave full vent. Flint, we have already seen, was in the forefront of the movement. The basic premise of vers libre, as it was reflected in Bergson's metaphysics, was that the poet had to follow the dictates of his emotions, a corollary being that he must understand them. It is also part of what Flint meant when he said that "the test of poetry is sincerity; the test of sincerity is style; and the test of style is personality".[2] Imagism also demanded that the poet pare and prune his work, lopping off excessive verbiage, leaving the image and nothing more. And Flint's second book, Cadences (1915) reflects

the revolution he had helped to put across in the intervening years.[3] It is Imagistic, but it is his brand of Imagism. Rhyme had all but disappeared, and rhythm had taken over. But it was a personal rhythm, attached to the body as it inspired. Flint called it "unrhymed cadence". His last major creative work, Otherworld Cadences, was published in 1920.[4] It abandoned the Imagist doctrine of composing only small poems, one image at a time. Flint had penetrated into the universal, into the reconciliation of space and time.

The themes of Flint's poems remained the same throughout his career. In 1909 he wrote about the working man's prison, London, and in 1920, the same theme recurs, but with a new perspective. He was romantic, and he dealt often with love and sex. Flint always wrote about nature, but it was as nature was defined in his emotions, sometimes a concise image in the Japanese manner, sometimes as herself. And with all his sincerity, Flint revealed mostly himself. Poverty dogged him, and he deeply resented that he could not give over to writing for a living. He struggled always with despair, directing his anguish most of all at the treacheries of men, often when their brutalities were aimed only at themselves.

In a note prefacing his first book of poems, Flint prepared his readers for what he thought would be a shock:

> This book is one poem.
> I have, as the mood dictated, filled a form or created one. I have used assonance for the charm of it, and not rhymed where there was no

> need to. In all, I have followed my ear and my heart, which may be false. I hope not (ii).

What followed was neither shocking, nor altogether commonplace. Flint in fact rarely abandoned rhyme, and his poems displayed mostly well-worn measures. Almost all of them are eminently forgettable, but they are not the worst of their kind; the reader might think he had picked up a volume by some amateur admirer of Keats. Typical, in tone and style, is "Futility":

> I hold the universe in my brain;
> And I walk along the streets and laugh
> That Life has mixed well all the chaff
> So small a measure, God! of grain.
>
> And Death is but a parfilage
> Of precious threads of silver and gold
> That with the stuff of Tellus old
> Are woven sparse from age to age.
>
> Annihilation's Gorgon stare
> Will freeze the genial Earth at last--
> With all her gibbous face icefast,
> Her genious vanished--God knows where.

The cosmic beginning rapidly deteriorates to the reworking of a homespun saying, complete with metre-filling "God!" The poem contains the kind of learned references, to Tellus and Gorgon, that were already worn out in Tennyson's youth.

Of more interest in a technical sense is "A Mood and its Images", in which Flint experimented with irregular metre while maintaining rhyme. While there is rhyme, there is little reason apparent in his breaking the poem into strangely formed lines:

I passed,
Beating my gold
Into an offering unto her whom last
I would have kissed; would she have understood
My wistful mood
Had I told
It was not she
I would have kissed in her, but me.
And for my friend's sake only she (p. 19).

If the poem has no merit, it at least reveals Flint attempting to break free of the poetic traditions, which he would later talk about as being "mouldering" forces in his New Age articles.

In "Stellar" Flint abandoned rhyme and metre. The poem contains a mixture popular with the young Flint, the cosmic and the personal. After some lines of not a little power,

Whirling in appalling circles, now
A world evolving, now a worm;
And helming all a spirit immanent,
Vast, overwhelming, guides the fall,
Unguiding, conscious only rides,
And riots, revels, dwells, and is.

we descend to

Cool of the evening, calm above,
How soon, O Moon, will love enfold,
And mirror purple in its pool,
My soul, star-cold, attuned with thine (p. 24),

which sounds very much like a lyric for a popular song. Despite abandoning end-rhyme and metre, Flint managed to make the poem seem conventional. It could easily have been written by Swinburne.

Flint divided In the Net of Stars into four parts, each representing a stage in his life preceding and after his marriage. The beginning section, "Preoccupations", expressed in romantic terms his feelings about his life in London.

Poetry was therapy, a way of dealing with his major problems, poverty and loneliness. Flint juxtaposed visions of "scarlet poppies" with the reality of "the traffic's jangle and its roar" (p. 11). The impulse to flee was to haunt his poems throughout his career, and the visions were his only means of escape. The dreariness of London infected his verse: "I have grown tired of the old measures wherein I beat by song" and he "longed for the great and broad-browed song of the ever-singing sea" (p. 14-15). Finally, Flint realized that he needed a lover, but he dealt with the problem in abstract terms, discussing it with those withered matchmakers, the moon and the sea (p. 24-25). In the second section, "The Mask of Gold", Flint found Her, and he celebrated with a series of poems detailing his courtship, with visits to the country, concerts, and so forth. Images of Nature, archaic ones, stand forth, in contrast to his earlier preoccupation with the drabness of the city. At the same time, Flint injected a frankly Christian note, notably in "Simplicity", where he compared Mary Magdalene's drying of Christ's feet with her hair to his own "shelter in a golden tress" with his love (p. 32-33). The section ends with Flint succumbing to his bride's wish that they have a child, despite his dread that they would "bend our backs and break them" trying to feed a large family (p. 37). "In the Net of Stars", the third section, contains a series of short love lyrics, which contain such unforgivable lines as "This is a rose of burning wine" (p. 53). Flint's fourth section, which he called

"Dream", contains a poem, "Evening", which resembles nothing so much as a series of haikus Japanese. The poem is pure symbol, and reflects Flint's interest in Japanese verse:

> One rose petal
> Falls to the moss
> With the weight of dew,--
> Dusky red on darkening green.
>
> A red rose trembles
> In the twilight--
> Glimmering silence
> And sleeping things.
>
> In the dun earth
> Beneath the mosses
> A rosetree tightens
> Its lace of roots;
>
> And the earth quivers.
> What is passing?
> What is present?--
> Dusky red on darkening green. (p. 66).

The book ends with a "Prophecy", an optimistic one at that. Written in imitation of Biblical style, it predicted that "there shall be abroad a new fervor among the nations" (p. 68). Thus, Flint ended his book, his "one poem", on a much more optimistic key than the one he began with. In the Net of the Stars, while not a particularly good book, is interesting because in it we see Flint attempting to shake free of the Romantics and to experiment, however mixed the results. He had not found his voice, but he was at least looking.

With Cadences, Flint became a full-fledged poet. He had begun to penetrate to himself, as Bergson suggested. The difference between 1909 and 1915 is amazing. Rhyme, with one exception, he abandoned along with metre. He took

his line length as it occurred to him, as his emotions dictated. No longer did he look to the imagined superiority of the archaic for his inspiration. Instead, he wrote about reality as he perceived and shaped it. To be sure, he faltered occasionally, especially with lines like "I am at your window singing--I am a bird" (p. 7). In "Hallucination", Flint captured the reality of a dream. Nothing of moment occurs in the poem, but it projects a feeling of uneasiness, and even terror:

> I know this room,
> and there are corridors:
> the pictures, I have seen before;
> the statues and those gems in cases
> I have wandered by before,--
> stood there silent and lonely
> in a dream of years ago.
>
> I know the dark of night is all around me;
> my eyes are closed, and I am half asleep.
> My wife breathes gently at my side.
>
> But once again this old dream is within me,
> and I am on a threshold waiting,
> wondering, pleased, and fearful.
> Where do those doors lead,
> what rooms lie beyond them?
> I venture . . .
>
> But my baby moves and tosses
> from side to side,
> and her need calls me to her.
>
> Now I stand awake, unseeing,
> in the dark,
> and I move towards her cot . . .
> I shall not reach her . . . There is no direction . . .
> I shall walk on . . . (p. 15).

It is the kind of poem done at least a thousand times before, but its language imparts the innate truthfulness and sincerity it would lack if written in "poetry".

Flint scrutinized his walking nightmare in "Courage", the bitter cry of a man doomed to drudgery. Only slight glimpses of nature are granted him, and the night renews his joy, even as the day "brings back my bitterness. /Each day I hope for courage to bear/and not to whine" (p. 18). And even in "Easter", reality impinges upon those who wish to escape on a joyous day. The poet and a friend take a holiday walk: "we laugh; we jest; we jeer;/and we save the fragments of our souls". The search for quiet:

> But here too is a group
> of men and women and children;
> and the swan has forgotten its pride;
> it thrusts its white neck among them,
> and gobbles at nothing;
> then tires of the cheat and sails off;
> but its breast urges before it
> a sheet of sodden newspaper
> that, drifting away,
> reveals beneath the immaculate white splendour
> of its neck and wings
> a breast black with scum.
>
> Friend, we are beaten. (p. 25).

And the symbol of love and light stands revealed as only reality can reveal it. Flint had said goodbye to the abstract; he was attempting to dispense with the symbol.

"Beggar" is Flint's attempt to unite the French and Japanese styles, and it is successful:

> In the gutter
> piping his sadness
> an old man stands,
> bent and shrivelled,
> beard draggled,
> eyes dead.

Huddled and mean,
shivering in threadbare clothes--
winds beat him,
hunger bites him,
forlorn, a whistle in his hands,
piping.

Hark! the strange quality
of his sorrowful music,
wind from an empty belly
wrought magically
into the wind,--

pattern of silver on bronze. (p. 26)

Flint recreated the actual play of the mind as it takes hold, distancing us from our initial emotions. The first stanza invites our sympathies through our eyes. In the second, the mind toys with the object as details begin to crowd in and surmise takes command, but still mixed with sympathy. Then, the mind moves to aesthetic considerations, as we are governed by both his music and only slightly by our sympathies. And finally, the haiku line: "pattern of silver on bronze", which reduces the entire scene to one image, one symbol inexplicable in any other terms but its own: it is language turned in on itself.

"Otherworld", the title poem in Flint's third volume, invites full discussion because it broke completely with the idea common among the Imagists that a poem must perforce be short; it instead provided a succession of images around which Flint spun his vision of the Bergsonian cosmos. Flint posited two worlds, one for himself and one for his alter ego, who lives "without my cares and weaknesses". The other Flint dwells on a planet so far away that "no light from the

star that lights and warms him can reach me" (p. 1). In the otherworld Flint enjoys an exquisite existence, possessing all the things--and they are simple things--that earthbound Flint envies: a country house, and "no invisible, gnawing bondage" (p. 2); and peace; and good things to eat; a wife serene and untroubled, and healthy, lively children. The otherworld's Flint is also a writer:

> And the words come to my pencil unsought,
> The beginning and the end, perhaps,
> With a phrase or two and full knowledge of the rest,
> Images, a rhythm, a complete passage,
> The outline, with some parts roughed in, of my poem--
> A song as artless as the thrush's on the plum-tree. (p. 6).

Earthbound Flint wears shabby clothes and he eats bread and butter for breakfast (Otherworld Flint has honey), and he has a dreary job, like his fellow slaves, and like them, he is driven by hunger--"the first law of our land". All serve the machine, having sold their freedom to be "gaoler and gaoled/ In a prison of our making that we might destroy tomorrow" (p. 6-7).

At work, London's Flint is doomed to write in "a slave language of counters", and to "see no wrong, and ask only for promotion". For seventeen years he has lived in the City, and known nothing but jeers and hatred (p. 7-8). Near the distant star his children pluck flowers while he enjoys a meditative morning, and the silent love of his wife. A friend comes to visit, and Flint goes off with him on a jaunt over mountains, to the sea (p. 9-13). And suddenly,

this world intrudes as Flint marches through the mud with a friend drafted for war, with thousands of others who possessed "so much kindliness, so much humour/And so little desire to kill" (p. 14-15). But Otherworld exists, and the other Flint sits beneath a cherry-tree in bloom, enjoying the quiet of the evening: "Perhaps in this calm and the calm of his mind he thinks of me" (p. 16).

"Otherworld" is based on the metaphysical idea that in the infinite number of space/time combinations, all possibilities co-exist. This is, therefore, not the best of all possible worlds, nor, as Flint pointed out (p. 2), is it the worst. But the imagination that is peculiar to Flint focused on the possibilities he wanted most. It was the sincere result of an inward penetration of the self, a juxtaposition of the real with the potential good:

> You may not believe in my other world; but it is
> no dream.
> It can be proved with compass and scales and a
> plus b.
> Who will integrate space and time and prove that
> the sum
> Does not contain the quantity I describe?
> Or all the grades of good and evil for every man,
> forming throughout the myriad universes
> A myriad perfect men and perfect minds (p. 15).

Flint moved from the scientific to the Biblical in his last major work, "The Making of Lilith".[5] This verse drama did not see the light of day until 1930, when Glenn Hughes brought out an anthology designed to show what the Imagists had been doing since the heyday of 1912-17. Flint's contribution was a verse drama based on the myth of the creation

of man. His description of the two leading characters destroyed any illusions that this was to be a mere retelling of the story of Genesis:

> God has straight black hair, angry nostrils, bushy eyebrows, eyes like molten metal, and a black beard that hides his mouth.
> Satan has golden hair, curling around his forehead and ears, and at the nape of the neck, nostrils sensitive to the scents of the air and the play of the mind, eloquent eyes, and a mouth like two strung bows. He has no beard, but a golden down on his cheeks.
> God inspires fear; Satan friendliness and love (p. 149).

As the drama begins, God and Satan argue over their creation, Adam, who lies asleep at their feet. God claims his might is enough to adequately create the universe. Satan answers:

> Yours is the force, it is true.
> But mine the skill
> That bends and shapes and hues
> Your gross endeavors (p. 149).

Flint here juxtaposed power and intelligence, claiming that one cannot exist without the other. When God and Satan argue about reality, indeed, whether they exist, God answers, as a perfect empiricist, "I do not know. /I always find you where I find myself" (p. 15). They awaken Adam to show him their handiwork (p. 152-54). God takes credit for creation, Satan for its shape. Soon, God becomes aware that Satan has tricked him: Adam is also intelligent, as even God is not, without Satan (p. 155-56). Adam, tired of their arguing, demands that they satisfy his three hungers, on grounds that God and Satan, as his creators, are responsible for his welfare. Adam is suffering from "The hunger of the belly . . .

a hunger of the heart . . . the hunger of the mind" (p. 157-58). They can satisfy the first two hungers, but not the third, says Satan:

> It is implanted in him as a goad
> To prick him on the road to his desire;
> And where he rests to dream,
> There he will build
> Structures abominable and beautiful--
> So they will seem--
> Out of his weakness and strength.
> He is a seeker who shall never find;
> He is a maker who shall make in vain;
> He is a plougher of an empty field;
> He is a watcher who shall only see
> The figments of his mind and think them truth
> (p. 159-60).

But Adam has an advantage over God and Satan:

> Power in itself is nothing, without thought;
> Intelligence is nothing, without power;
> Together they are nothing without forms;
> These are the forms; this universe, this man;
> Partaking of your power and my thought,
> Projected from us, but within us still;
> Able to move without us and to shape
> On the blank surface of our nothingness
> Aphysiognomy, perhaps a grace (p. 160).

Flint ended the drama by having God and Satan create Lilith for Adam, with Gabriel, Michael, and Pan cheering them on.

"The Making of Lilith" champions the belief that power and intelligence should, in the perfect state of things, operate in a dialectic. The forms, in man's mind, are supposed to hold them to their proper proportions. But it is man's fate to be ever restless, to direct himself outward, away from the forms. The categories he will eventually find outside of himself are good and evil. The poem marked a complete departure from Flint's usual style (hence, perhaps, the long delay in its publication). Where he normally got

at the universe through introspection, in "Lilith" he attacked his cosmic themes by means of a conscious attempt at mythmaking. The effort is far less successful than "Otherworld" and many of the shorter poems. His mature work generally reflected his ideas of what a poet should do:

> Every man, unless he is a poet, speaks to his fellows in forms of speech that have been consecrated by ages. Ignore these forms and invent new, you become unintelligible. Invent new and add them to the common store, you are doing the work of a poet.[6]

Flint did the work of a poet. By example, he helped break English poetry free from the bonds of rhyme and metre, and he showed the way toward vers libre and the image. Perhaps more important, however, he showed that the personal lyric could survive in the day of the new classicism heralded by Hulme and Eliot.

Notes

[1]F. S. Flint, *In the Net of the Stars* (London: Elkin Mathews, 1909).

[2]F. S. Flint, "Presentation", *The Monthly Chapbook*, March, 1920, p. 17.

[3]F. S. Flint, *Cadences* (London: Poetry Bookshop, 1915).

[4]F. S. Flint, *Otherworld* (London: Poetry Bookshop, 1920).

[5]F. S. Flint, "The Making of Lilith", *Imagist Anthology 1930*, ed. Glenn Hughes (New York: Covici, 1930), p. 147-163.

[6]F. S. Flint, "French Chronicle", *Poetry and Drama*, December, 1914, p. 398.

Conclusion

F. S. Flint was, at the end of his public career, strangely bitter about his own work, and dubious about most of his fellow Imagists. In 1932, long after he had abandoned his own production, he was to write "I have often wondered whether any of the Imagists were, in fact poets--in the severe sense of the word. I reject myself at once; my writings make me feel physically sick." Of the rest of the Imagists, he accepted only H. D., and, grudgingly, Ezra Pound, in whom "you can undoubtedly detect a thin, tinny sound of poetry."[1] In his autobiography, Life is My Song, John Gould Fletcher, who as a wealthy young American expatriate had come to England and joined the Imagists, offered an insight on Flint's personality which helps to explain Flint's attitude:

> There was also Frank Flint, bespectacled, shy, apologetic, whose attitude towards life and poetry afforded an instructive contrast to that of either Pound or Hulme. His dominating characteristic was a pathetic sincerity. Born to circumstances of direst poverty, forced to get an education as best he might, never released from the hard necessity of having to earn his own living, he had interested himself in the symbolist movement to such an extent that when Emile Verhaeren came to London and read some of his poems before an audience at the Poetry Bookshop, Flint had constituted himself companion and guide to the Belgian poet, and had shepherded him--ignorant of English as he was--through London for several days. He was, like myself, fully aware of all the literary currents of Paris. . . . Regarding himself as a badly educated man, ashamed of his own Cockney antecedents, he could easily be talked down by Ezra, or by anyone who appeared to be better educated, and who was capable of making flat, dogmatic assertions. In life and in his own poetry he was already suffering from that sense of personal inferiority which has made him

> a tragically ineffectual figure. And though I liked him, I soon realized that he was doomed perpetually to follow, and never to lead.[2]

If Flint was, as Fletcher said, ineffectual, he did not appear as such in his columns on French poetry or in his reviews of English verse. And he was not so ineffectual that his superiors thought him incapable. By Fletcher's own testimony, when he sought companionship during World War I, none was to be had! "Flint /was/ effectually buried in an important official position, . . ." (p. 253).

But as to Flint's love-hate relationship with his poetry, as early as 1915, Harold Monro wrote:

> The two poets who still remain for discussion are F. S. Flint and Amy Lowell. The one seems to have yoked the difficulties of the Imagist position on to his shoulders; the other to have succeeded in shirking them. Mr. Flint turns the eccentricities of the school to his own advantage. He writes like a man who almost hates poetry, but can't help loving it. I find in him free-verse with a rhythm so definite, that it seems fully to warrant the typographical device of the division into lines.[3]

It seems apparent that Flint used his poetry as a shield, that it was in fact his "other world", a place to which he could escape from his dreary bureaucrat's existence. It is equally apparent that he was of great importance in the general movement into modern poetry, both in his expert explanations of and proselyting for French poetry, and in his own experiments with <u>vers libre</u>. His poetry did not often catch the attention of the "literary establishment", and it was therefore neither financially profitable nor conducive to establishing fame.

At the height of Flint's career, in 1915, Richard Aldington said:

> I salute in Mr. Flint a poet--the poet?--who has not sold his faith, whose constant experiments in rhythm and expression will be of vast assistance and encouragement to his confreres of the future: if he succeeds in reconciling us with a forced existence in this gloomy market-prison-metropolis he will have accomplished a very difficult and admirable task.[4]

He did not succeed because he could not reconcile himself to such a forced existence. At some time, Flint decided that his poetry could not set him free, as it had liberated others. In the only general evaluation of his poetry ever printed, May Sinclair offered her readers a choice by way of finding Flint's place in literary history:

> If you had to choose between the new poets and the old, say Mr. Flint and John Keats? Mercifully the hospitalities of the universe do not confront us with such alternatives, but if we were all three in the water, and if I were the only swimmer of the three, and if I could only save one of them--well, I suppose it would have to be John Keats. But I should not relinquish Mr. Flint without a struggle, or see him sink without a pang, an agony of regret for a fairly computable loss to literature.[5]

Unfortunately, we cannot make a choice between Flint and anyone; we can only regret that he stopped writing poems at the peak of his powers and that we are thus bereft.

Notes

[1]F. S. Flint, "Verse Chronicle", The Criterion, July, 1932, p. 687.

[2]John Gould Fletcher, Life is My Song (New York: Farrar, 1937), p. 76-77.

[3]Harold Monro, "The Imagists Discussed", The Egoist, May 15, 1915, p. 80.

[4]Richard Aldington, "The Poetry of F. S. Flint", The Egoist, May 15, 1915, p. 81.

[5]May Sinclair, "The Poems of F. S. Flint", The English Review, January, 1921, p. 18.

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