



## FACULTY OF ARTS Charles University

Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures

### Opponent's Report

#### **Imagism, Imagists, and Imagery: Ezra Pound, H.D. and William Carlos Williams**

BA thesis by Anna Pavienska

The thesis aims to offer an examination of the main features of one of the most significant Anglo-American poetic movements of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Imagism, through the analysis of the key poetic texts representing this movement.

The thesis is structured accordingly: after a more general Chapter I, which briefly introduces the famous three main “rules” or requirements proposed by Ezra Pound to define an imagist poem, offers an overview of the historical and cultural context of the movement and introduces its main representatives, the core of the thesis is formed by three chapters dedicated to the key poetic texts representing the movement: poems by William Carlos Williams (Chapter II), by Ezra Pound (Chapter III) and by three poets whose works appear in the famous Imagist anthology *Des Imagistes*, H.D., Richard Aldington and F. S. Flint (Chapter IV). The “Conclusion” briefly outlines the further development of the works of these five poets after the movement itself ended.

While the concept, the aim of the thesis, the structure, the material and the method adopted are clear, make perfect sense and have the potential to lead to a fine result, the execution itself fails to fulfil this promise. Questions arise already in the Introduction where, for some reason, the three major dictums are listed twice in the first two paragraphs (and are repeated again and again with each of the close readings that follow later in the thesis), while, the explanation of each of them is rather sketchy – that would be acceptable if the following chapters offered a persuasive in-depth commentary on the three “rules” through the close-readings of the key representative texts of the movement. But that does not quite happen, and the expectations raised by the abstract and the introduction remain frustrated. The three key features of Imagism famously (and relatively obliquely) formulated by Pound deserve detailed interpretation as they are not precise theoretical definitions, but rather poetic images themselves. However, the thesis



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fails to offer such interpretation and it largely remains on the surface and does not delve deeper into the complex issues the imagist poetics presents. I am sorry to say that, as it is, the thesis is a sloppily written summary of the basic well-known truths (even clichés) about Imagism. While the BA thesis is not expected to necessarily bring in new insights and develop original ideas, it needs to stick to academic standards, which is not always the case here.

The close readings of the poems that form the core of the thesis all mechanically follow the same pattern – commenting on the presence of each of the three Imagist “rules” in the particular poem – which gets rather tedious after a while. At the same time, not much seems to come out of these analyses in terms of an insightful conclusion or a comparison. Rather than organically built readings of the poems, these are notes on them that could be further turned into well-argued interpretations.

The overall style of the thesis is vague, imprecise, repetitive and often awkward, closer to popular, chatty style than to standard academic writing. To illustrate this point I will use just one short example out of many similar ones that can be found throughout the thesis: “Style-wise, Imagist poetry ignored first-person narration or other common mediating structures, avoided standard poetic forms and meter, and utilized as few words as possible“ (p. 3). While a sentence like this could be well used in a popular article on Imagism, as a piece of scholarly writing it is faulty for several reasons: the form “style-wise” is rather colloquial than standard and neutral, “poetry ignored first-person narration” does not make much sense as first-person narration is a term typically related to prose fiction (in lyric poetry we would probably speak about a “first-person speaker”, “lyrical subject”, the “I”, etc.), “other common mediating structures” is quite obscure and would need more explanation (what are “other common mediating structures” similar to the first-person speaker? and is the first-person speaker a “mediating structure”? where does the term come from?), rather than “standard” poetic forms and meter we would probably speak about traditional (or regular) forms and meters... Too many passages of the thesis could be subjected to a similar critical scrutiny with a similar result. The outcome is the overall vagueness and a certain “dilettante” feel of the text.



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There is an obvious lack of careful (or any) editing, which results in a number of typos, spelling mistakes, missing words, and even rather confused use of terms (“*Poetry* was the first literary genre (sic!) to publish the works of Richard Aldington, H.D., Marianne Moore, Carl Sandburg, Wallace Stevens“ – one cannot help but wonder how „journal“ could turn into “genre”...), stylistic awkwardness (“With Pound’s identity as a poet, one comes across a diversity of perspectives and identities in Pound.“). It is not unusual to find sentences and paragraphs that are syntactically faulty to the extent that virtually prevents a clear understanding of the passage: “After 1912, Yeats and Pound started to work with the Fenollosa (Typescripts that have been edited and manuscripts mostly focused on the Japanese Nō theater. Nō gave Pound special credit for demonstrating the viability of a lengthy Imagist or Vorticist piece.) manuscripts and Yeats to find a poetry technique that could impart form to commonplace material while maintaining accuracy and conversational comfort”. One could continue piling up examples like these.

It looks like the thesis has been put together hastily, with no time for the development of arguments that would move beyond well-worn clichés about Imagism, for careful phrasing with attention to nuances of expression, or diligent editing. It is more of a first draft that could serve as the starting point to build a thesis.

Questions for the defence:

Could you expand on your explanation of the position of Imagism in the broader context of Anglo-American Modernism? What was the afterlife of Imagism? You mention its “fleeting” existence and discuss the representatives turning away from it (except for H.D. who was “left behind” as a loyal imagist “as the poetic world moved on” elsewhere). However, this picture created by the thesis does not seem to be quite accurate – can you comment on the impact Imagism had on the development of modern American poetry?

There are many passages in the thesis that I simply struggle to understand. Could you explain, for example, the last paragraph of the analysis of “In a Station of the Metro”, which concerns the dictum about rhythm? “The third rule of Imagism regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence

of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome, is analyzed by Lipke and Rozran, as

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they bring attention to, considering these “spaces between rhythmic units” and remembering the third “rule” of the Imagists is fascinating. When composing rhythm, follow the order of the musical phrase rather than a metronome. There have been numerous experiments with this emphasis on the visual arrangement of phrases and lines, but “Metro” was not one of them“ (p. 24).

Could you comment in more detail on the role of the “thing” in Imagism? How does this focus relate to the Modernist insistence on newness and the breaking away from tradition? How does the use of free verse you mention repeatedly in the thesis relate to the treatment of “things” by Imagist poets?

In my opinion, the thesis struggles to meet the requirements for a BA thesis and depending on the candidate’s performance at the defence I tentatively propose the grade of “dobře“.

Prague, August 28, 2023

doc. PhDr. Mariana Machová, Ph.D.