

THE POETIC TECHNIQUE OF AMY LOWELL

THESIS

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By

James Victor Bishop, B. A.
(Kerrville, Texas)

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PREFACE

Most everyone has heard of Amy Lowell in one way or another. During her lifetime she perhaps made a greater personal impression than any other of her American contemporaries, and even before her death in 1925 she was becoming a legendary figure. This paper, however, is not concerned with the Amy Lowell legend nor with the argument that Miss Lowell was lacking in genius. The majority opinion, in fact, is that she was not an outstanding poet, but no one denies that she was an untiring experimenter and master craftsman. For several years I have been interested in Miss Lowell's style of writing; consequently I have chosen for my thesis an analysis of her poetic technique. Constituting the bulk of this paper is a discussion of the following devices which, in my opinion, are the outstanding elements in Miss Lowell's poetry: free verse, polyphonic prose, symbolism, imagism, and "colorism."

In preparing this thesis, I have leaned heavily on S. Foster Damon's biography, Amy Lowell: A Chronicle. The primary source, however, was Miss Lowell's own volumes of poetry, including prefaces in which she explains many of her ideas on writing. Imagism and the Imagists, by Glenn Hughes, was also a valuable source of information.

Perhaps it would be well, at this point, to mention other theses on Amy Lowell that I have examined at the University of Texas. They are Amy Lowell, Critic by Charlotte Vela Pickard, Amy Lowell and the Far East by Inez Hatley, and The Art of Amy Lowell by Josephine Miller Bramlette. There is perhaps some overlapping between my paper and the Bramlette thesis in the treatment of Miss Lowell's versification, although I have added a considerable amount of new material, especially through an analysis of various samples of free verse. My chapter on symbolism, imagism, and "colorism" contains material not presented in any of the other theses. For the above reasons I feel that this additional paper on Amy Lowell is justified.

To Dr. L. N. Wright, head of the English Department and chairman of the committee for this thesis, I extend my sincere appreciation for his interest and constructive criticism, without which the development of this paper would have been impossible. Grateful acknowledgement is due, likewise, to Sue Taylor and Dr. J. Lloyd Read, committee members, for the freedom granted in the writing of this thesis.

James Victor Bishop

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CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amy Lowell (February 9, 1874--May 12, 1925), American poet and critic, was born in Brookline, Massachusetts, at the Lowell place, Sevenels, on 70 Heath Street.

As a child she customarily added 'of Brookline' to her name; as a woman she made her home there, in her father's house; she died there; and the word 'Brookline' appears on her tombstone. Yet this rebellious attitude of hers against Boston was caused and conditioned by the fact that she was so thoroughly, inescapably, and proudly a Bostonian. Her family was of the older Bostonese, with a house on Commonwealth Avenue; she was educated in Boston (whether at the private schools or the Athenaeum); she 'came out' there; she was intimately connected with many phases of Boston life; and there she made her first and last appearances as a reader of her own poems. She loved Boston as heartily as any other Bostonian, and scolded about it, as all the best Bostonians do; but in Brookline, only four miles from the State House, was her home. It was characteristic of Miss Lowell that she would have made this slight rebellion by identifying herself with the place that meant so much to her . . . But she never dreamed of denying that she was a Bostonian.¹

Much the youngest child of Augustus and Katherine (Lawrence) Lowell, Amy had four brothers and sisters: Percival, the astronomer, nearly nineteen years older than she; Abbott Lawrence, a Harvard president, seventeen at the time of Amy's birth; and two sisters, Katherine and Elizabeth,

¹

S. Foster Damon, Amy Lowell: A Chronicle, p. 3.

respectively sixteen and twelve years older.

Sevenels, the Lowell's Brookline estate, furnished a perfect setting and atmosphere for an imaginative child; and Miss Lowell's whole existence was suffused with this home, surrounded with lawns, meadows, trees, and flower gardens, which were in a blaze of color much of the year. These gardens and the hot houses were the main source for the "colorism" and flower images which permeate so much of her poetry.

Her Brookline home, however, was only one influence (though a predominant one) in a widely varied environment. The beginning of her travels, which continued through most of her life, started with trips to Europe and to California when she was eight and nine, respectively. Percival Lowell spent ten years (1883-1893) in the Far East, chiefly in Japan; and through him Amy had her first contact with the glamour of the Orient, which was later to furnish material for a considerable amount of her poetry.

The only formal education which Amy Lowell received was in private schools. Her mother, an accomplished musician and linguist, spent much time teaching Amy, however; and it was from Mrs. Lowell that she got, among other things, a thorough grounding in French. In the library at Sevenels, by her own determination, Miss Lowell continued her learning.

In 1896 she spent six months in Europe. She went up the Nile in a dahabiyek in the winter of 1897-98. This

trip, which had been planned as a rest, proved over-
strenuous and brought on a nervous breakdown. She recovered
from this illness on a fruit ranch in California during the
winter of 1898-99 and spent the following summer in Devon-
shire. The summer of 1905 she also spent in Europe. During
the winter and spring of 1908 she was on the Continent, this
time visiting Greece and Turkey.

When her father died in 1900 (her mother had died five
years before), Miss Lowell bought Sevenels. With a large
house all to herself, strangely she chose to remain on the
top story in the Sky Parlour, where she had lived always.
The same year she rented, and later bought, a sixty acre
summer place in Dublin, New Hampshire. She named it Broom-
ley Lacey.

But the year 1902 was an especially significant one.
After she saw Eleanora Duse on a triumphant third tour, Miss
Lowell, an ardent admirer of the actress, was so inspired by
Duse's opening performance that she felt compelled to write
a poem. Miss Lowell commented as follows on this particular
incident, which apparently marked the beginning of her ca-
reer in poetry:

The effect on me was something tremendous. What
really happened was that it revealed me to myself,
but I hardly knew that at the time. I just knew
that I had got to express the sensations that
Duse's acting gave me, somehow. I knew nothing
whatever about the technique of poetry, I had never
heard of vers libre, I had never analyzed blank

verse--I was as ignorant as anyone could be.²

A poem, consisting of seventy-one lines of poor blank verse, was the result of this inspiration; and from then on the main drive in her life was poetry. On another occasion she remarked: "I began to write, not specifically about Madame Duse, but simply out of the fullness of the vision of poetry which she had given me."³

By the time she had recognized her life's work and had written her first poem, Miss Lowell was already twenty-eight; and it was not until 1910 that her first published poem, "A Fixed Idea," appeared in the Atlantic Monthly for August. Then in October, 1912, her first volume of poetry, A Dome of Many Coloured Glass, was published by Houghton Mifflin Company. This small volume of sixty-nine poems is not especially good, even as first volumes go, and it is quite different in tone from her succeeding work. Miss Lowell, nevertheless, indicates or treats many of the themes that appear in succeeding volumes.

According to Damon it is a certain honesty of treatment which constitutes the main promise of the book:

On the surface there is little promise of success. The book is sincere but restrained, dignified but

² From a letter to Eunice Tietjens as quoted in Damon, op. cit., p. 148.

³ From a letter to Ellery Sedgwick as quoted in Damon, op. cit., p. 150.

conventional. There are poems about the seasons, about one's longings, about things. There are sonnets, building up to the predestinate last line; there is syllabic blank verse, with every urge of cadence ironed out; there are unrhymed hexameters and some rhymed stanza-patterns, original yet not seeming so. The book might tell the story and the tastes of a thousand women; yet only one woman could have written it, as we now can see in light touches here and there. As with the Italian primitives, the attitudes are the stock ones, but the landscape behind is fresh--the flowers are real flowers and the weather real weather.⁴

The influence of Keats is strong in this volume; and in "Before the Altar," the first and best selection in the book, the moon symbolism of Keats' "Endymion" is copied. "Before the Altar," through its rhyme scheme and irregular lines, also shows some influence of the vers libre of the French. In fact, Miss Lowell later claimed this poem as her first attempt at free verse.⁵ In 1912, however, vers libre had not made its way into American poetry, and Imagism was unknown; but as early as 1908 Miss Lowell had been introduced to French poetry by Carl Engel, a young American composer.

Since she had already become interested in freer forms and more vividness in imagery and had written one piece, "In a Garden," in a somewhat unconventional style, it was quite natural that the poet would be attracted to a new Imagiste group in England, where she visited in 1913. She

⁴Op. cit., p. 187.

⁵Ibid., p. 188.

had brought with her a letter of introduction from Harriet Monroe, founder of Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, to Ezra Pound, an American poet living in England. He had taken over the leadership of an Imagiste movement, which had been originated by Thomas Ernest Hulme, an English philosopher, and she eagerly joined forces with this group of young poets, who were revolting against conventionality.

In 1914, when Miss Lowell returned to England, she was anxious to champion the new poetry, at least in America. She and Pound, however, soon disagreed over certain beliefs and made a break; but the other Imagists sided with Amy Lowell. She became the new leader of Imagism; and when she returned to the United States in 1914, she brought with her the manuscript of Some Imagist Poets. This first anthology was published in 1915 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Two other anthologies were published by the same company; one in 1916 and the last one in 1917. During these three years Miss Lowell was the main leader in an offensive campaign for the new poetry, and she continued this war even after the last Imagist anthology was published.

The beginning of her real career in poetry is marked by Sword Blades and Poppy Seed, published by the Macmillan Company in 1914. This volume is divided into two parts: "Sword Blades" and "Poppy Seed." In an opening poem the old shop keeper, "Emphraim Bard, Dealer in Words," explains the nature of the book to a "customer":

All books are either dreams or swords,
You can cut, or you can drug, with words.⁶

The first examples of vers libre, polyphonic prose, and Imagism, actually presented as such, are found in this volume. Still there are several poems written in conventional forms. In the preface Miss Lowell explains vers libre and mentions polyphonic prose. The first poem, entitled "Sword Blades and Poppy Seed," is a symbolic narrative, a form used for several other pieces in this volume.

Miss Lowell's third book was Six French Poets, a group of critical essays. This Macmillan publication was "the great event of November, 1915."⁷ The six French poets presented are Émile Verhaeren, Albert Samain, Remy de Gourmont, Henri de Régnier, Francis Jammes, and Paul Fort.

In 1917 Richard Hunt made the following criticism of this book:

Few criticisms of today are at once so penetrating and such good reading, -- . . . Many pages in the back of the book are devoted to her translations of the more important poems of each man.⁸

Men, Women and Ghosts, a volume of poetry, was published by Houghton Mifflin Company in the fall of 1916.

⁶
Sword Blades and Poppy Seed, p. 18.

⁷
Damon, op. cit., p. 319.

⁸
Richard Hunt and Royall H. Snow, Amy Lowell: Sketches Biographical and Critical, p. 10.

As pointed out by Miss Lowell in the preface, this is a book of stories. She says: "For that reason I have excluded all purely lyrical poems. But the word 'stories' has been stretched to its fullest application."⁹ About thirty per cent of this book is in rhymed meter; fifty per cent is in free verse, and the rest in polyphonic prose. Damon¹⁰ points out that "Patterns," the first selection in this volume, was the first of her poems to become really popular and that it is still considered a great piece. "The Bombardment," filled with excellent images, is one of Miss Lowell's best short pieces of polyphonic prose.

Amy Lowell's fifth book was Tendencies in Modern American Poetry, published by the Macmillan Company in October, 1917. In this volume the new poetry movement is divided into three vital tendencies which show the change from the Victorian to the modern. Edwin Arlington Robinson and Robert Frost exemplify the pioneers in the movement; Edgar Lee Masters and Carl Sandburg are presented as typical poets who carried the movement further along; and H. D. and John Gould Fletcher, the Imagists, represent a changed condition in 1917. Damon praises the book:

Tendencies in Modern American Poetry was the most important critical work produced in the United States

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Men, Women and Ghosts, p. vii.

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Op. cit., p. 375.

for many years. It gave a structure and a meaning to our modern poetry, which hitherto had been aimless and confused in the minds of the people.¹¹

In September, 1918, Can Grande's Castle was published by the Macmillan Company. It is made up of four long poems in polyphonic prose: "Sea-Blue and Blood-Red," "Guns as Keys: And the Great Gate Swings," "Hedge Island," and "The Bronze Horses." The general theme of this book is war, but by no means a glorification of war. Damon also praises this volume:

Can Grande's Castle was Amy Lowell's first completely original book--original in meter, method, structure, and meaning . . . Never did she produce anything more splendid, though some of her later work was richer.¹²

Can Grande's Castle was praised by both the critics and the public, and Miss Lowell received many letters of congratulations. Her reputation was becoming established in America. Letters from France led her to believe her fame was spreading over there, and she was confident that she could win over England if she could only make another trip. She was never able to make this trip, however, but she continued her campaign for her poetry and the new poetry in general from the United States.

A volume of 174 short lyrics, Pictures of the Floating

¹¹
Ibid., p. 426.

¹²
Ibid., p. 478.

World, came out in September, 1919, published by Macmillan. An Oriental influence is apparent in parts of this book, especially in the first section which is made up of fifty-nine "Lacquer Prints." These poems are written in the mood of the hokku, a Japanese verse form, and on Japanese subjects. The second part of the book, "Planes of Personality," is subdivided into six sections. Two popular pieces found in the last half are "Vernal Equinox" and "Madonna of the Evening Flowers."

Miss Lowell was in Texas in June, 1920. She received the degree of Litt. D. in the Diamond Jubilee Commencement at Baylor University. While she was at Baylor, she lectured on "Vers Libre and Imagism" and read selections from her own poetry. On the way home she wrote her poem "Texas," which can be found in What's O'clock.

On February 23, 1921, she delivered the Keats Centenary address at Yale; and after preparing this lecture, she decided to do a biography of Keats. Her own Keats collection, including a considerable amount of unpublished material, was the largest and best in existence. Filled with enthusiasm for this project, she hoped to have her projected life of Keats finished by that autumn. Actually, after numerous delays and interruptions, the manuscript was completed in July, 1924. Miss Lowell discovered that scholarship was much slower than creation.

In May, 1921, Legends was published in an edition of

2500 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Damon summarized the nature and content of the book in the following paragraph:

The poet who wishes to compete with the great poets of the past must have great subjects. Amy Lowell, after the historical studies which produced Can Grande's Castle, delved yet deeper for Legends, going into folklore, which is the very tap-root of literature. Her new book contained seven symbolic tales, three tales of superstition, and one dramatic lyric.¹³

Miss Lowell gives in a preface an interesting definition of the legend and comments on some of her own legends included in the volume.

Her symbolic tales, three of which are "Memorandum Confided by a Yucca to a Passion-Vine," "Many Swans," and "Dried Marjoram," will be discussed in a later chapter.

Even with a poor market two thousand copies of Legends sold within three weeks. The critics and readers alike accepted this book as genuine poetry.

Following Legends, Fir Flower Tablets was published in December by Houghton Mifflin. This volume contains 137 poems (eighty-three of which are by Li T'ai Po and thirteen by Tu Fu) translated from the Chinese by Florence Ayscough and put into poetic form by Miss Lowell. Damon points out that Fir Flower Tablets was "a climax of a literary trend of the times."¹⁴ By the time of its publication there were numerous

¹³ Ibid., p. 557.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 587.

translations in both English and French, and the younger poets were recognizing something kindred in the Chinese poets.

A Critical Fable, patterned after James Russell Lowell's Fable for Critics, was published as a hoax in September, 1922. Every precaution was taken to prevent the discovery of the identity of the author, and in the files of Houghton Mifflin Company the name was listed as William Williams John. Miss Lowell, copying the style of her cousin, presented sketches of the American poets, modern and conservative, whom she considered the best of their kind. Damon makes the following comment on the book: "Jocose in tone, the book was really a most serious estimate of the leading figures of American poetry in 1922."¹⁵

The great Duse, who had inspired Amy's first poem, returned to the United States in the fall of 1923 for her last tour. (She died in this country April 20, 1924.) Miss Lowell put aside her work on Keats and went to New York for Duse's performances at the Metropolitan Opera House. On December 7 Duse visited at Sevenels. Several poems were inspired by Miss Lowell's last contacts with this great actress.

John Keats, undoubtedly the greatest of Amy Lowell's works, poetic or critical, was published February 10, 1925, by Houghton Mifflin and had already gone into a fourth edition

¹⁵

Ibid., p. 618.

by February 15. Miss Lowell was the logical person to do such a biography. Ever since she was a girl, she had been a great admirer of Keats. Then she owned what she believed to be the largest Keats collection in the world and had access to a considerable amount of other Keats material in the United States. Her John Keats is interesting as the life of one poet relived and interpreted by another poet. Damon points out the worth of this book: "As a work of scholarship, the book is such a contribution to knowledge that no one henceforth can write on Keats without taking Amy Lowell's book into account."¹⁶ He further states that it is "great biography of a poet, a profound book about poetry."¹⁷

But the four years spent on this book were too strenuous for a person already in poor health. She died three months after its publication. The long delayed trip to England was to be made that spring, and the sailing time had been set for April 15. On April 10, however, she became ill, and on May 12 she was stricken with paralysis. Looking in her mirror that afternoon, she saw the right side of her face sag and recognized her death. A few seconds later she became unconscious and died in a hour and a half, at 5:30. Miss

¹⁶
Ibid., p. 682.

¹⁷
Ibid., p. 684.

Lowell's body, which was cremated, was buried at Mount Auburn in the Lowell lot, Friday morning, May 15. In keeping with her request, there were no religious services at her funeral. Her great library was left to Harvard.

From 1915 until shortly before her death she lectured and read from her poetry before various university and social groups all over the country. There was a definite brilliancy about her reading and speaking. Through these frequent appearances, as well as through numerous articles in periodicals, she presented and defended her poetry and beliefs and the new poetry in general. Sevenels was also the scene of many literary discussions, for many of the leading writers and critics of the day were guests in Amy Lowell's home.

In this biographical sketch some mention must be made of Mrs. Ada Dwyer Russell, an American actress. Miss Lowell and Mrs. Russell met when the latter was playing in Boston in 1912, and they became friends at once. For several years Mrs. Russell lived at Sevenels as Miss Lowell's companion and adviser. John Keats was dedicated "To A.D.R. This, and all my books. A.L." In her will Amy left "the use of Sevenels and the income from a trust-fund"¹⁸ to Mrs. Russell. It was Mrs. Russell who completed preparations for the publication of Miss Lowell's unpublished poetry.

¹⁸

Ibid., p. 703.

Three posthumous volumes have been published by Houghton Mifflin Company. What's O'Clock, the first one, came out in 1925, and contains good examples of most of the types used by Amy Lowell in previous volumes. The two beautiful poems, "Lilacs" and "Purple Grackles," are found in this book. Of the several symbolist pieces, "Fool o' the Moon" is considered the greatest.

In 1926 East Wind was published. This volume, which contains thirteen monodramas in "The Overgrown Pasture" vein, depicts the decadence of rural New England.

The last posthumous book is Ballads for Sale (1927), a profusion of poetry edited by Mrs. Russell.

Selected Poems of Amy Lowell, edited by John Livingston Lowes, was published in 1928 by Houghton Mifflin Company. This book is made up of seventy-five poems selected from eleven volumes, containing more than 650 titles.

A selection of essays, entitled Poetry and Poets, was published in 1930. These essays were chosen by Ferris Greenslet.

Correspondence of a Friendship by Florence Ayscough and Amy Lowell was published in 1945 by the University of Chicago Press. This book, made up chiefly of letters written by Florence Ayscough and Miss Lowell, has a preface by the editor, Harley Farnsworth MacNair.

Phantasms of War is still unpublished. "This manuscript, prepared for publication in 1918, consists of eleven

longish poems about the World War. The first was written shortly before we joined the Allies; the last shortly after the Armistice."¹⁹

In the introduction to his Amy Lowell, Damon speaks of her accomplishment in the field of poetry:

Her life was essentially the triumph of the spirit over the tragedy of the body. She was a sick person from her early girlhood, yet her energy exceeded that of a dozen minor poets. Every obstacle except poverty blocked her path. She was twenty-eight when she wrote her first poem, thirty-eight when she published her first book, and only fifty-one when she died so abruptly. Yet in those brief years of public literary life, broken though they were by illnesses and eyestrain and a series of operations, she rose, through bored indifference, through ridicule and controversy and hatred, to complete victory, dying 'at the zenith of her fame' (as every newspaper phrased it: meaning simply that her powers had not started to wane, were still increasing).²⁰

(The above biographical sketch is based nearly altogether on S. Foster Damon's Amy Lowell: A Chronicle, the authorized biography of Miss Lowell.)

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 717.

²⁰ Ibid., p. xii.

CHAPTER II

AMY LOWELL AND THE IMAGIST MOVEMENT

When Amy Lowell went to England in 1913, she became associated with Ezra Pound and a group of young poets who called themselves Imagistes. This group, attempting to escape from the conventionality of the subject matter, forms, and rhythms used in American and English poetry, formulated certain principles which culminated in an Imagist movement in England and America. The origin and development of this movement will be summarized, but it is with Miss Lowell's leadership in the campaign for Imagism and the statement of the Imagist credo that this chapter will be primarily concerned.

In discussing the origins of this school, Hughes explains that there were two main sources of inspiration: ancient and modern. "The ancient literatures contributing to its ideals were Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Chinese, and Japanese. The modern influence was French."¹

The French influence was an especially important one; in fact, Symbolism, the main force in French poetry from 1885 to 1900, was the immediate forerunner of Imagism. The

¹ Glenn Hughes, Imagism and the Imagists, p. 3.

Anglo-American group found in the Symbolist school examples of an organized movement. Even though the individual Imagist poets were influenced by different French writers, a majority of the Imagists read widely from French poetry. Miss Lowell, who had a thorough knowledge of French, had been introduced to French poetry as early as 1908. According to M. René Taupin,² Henri de Régnier and Paul Fort were the vital French influences on her work.

Examining the English origins of Imagism, one finds that the Englishman T. E. Hulme, an aesthetic philosopher, is considered the "father of Imagism." Through his writings, which consisted of five poems, some articles in periodicals, and numerous personal notes, Hulme presented the first Imagist ideals. His aggressiveness and originality also furnished early leadership so necessary to the development of a new school. It was Ezra Pound, however, who actually assumed the first real literary leadership for the new poetry in London, and he was the first to use various terms derived from the idea of "the image":

He introduced them to England in the preface to Hulme's poems; to America in the November 1912 issue of Poetry (Chicago), wherein appeared three poems by Richard Aldington, with a biographical note classifying him as an "imagiste." To the January 1913 issue of Poetry, Pound contributed some literary notes from London, and one of these was to the effect that "The youngest school here that has the nerve to call itself a school

²
Ibid., p. 8.

is that of the Imagistes."³

In the March, 1913, number of Poetry, Pound, who was a foreign correspondent for the magazine, presented the four cardinal principles of Imagism. In the same issue he defined the "Image" as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time."⁴ This was the first publication of an Imagist credo, but the official one did not appear until 1915 in Some Imagist Poets. By then Pound had withdrawn from the group.

One of the main channels of expression for the poets working to establish Imagism as a movement was Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, established in Chicago by Harriet Monroe in the fall of 1912. Having returned from China in 1911, Miss Monroe was impressed by the recognition given poetry in that country and wanted to develop more interest in poetry in America.

In March, 1914, Des Imagistes: An Anthology was edited by Ezra Pound, who was also one of the contributors. Amy Lowell's "In a Garden," which is considered her first attempt at free verse, was used in this collection.

Once Pound had launched Imagism, he began losing interest in it because he was afraid of belonging to a dying

³
Ibid., p. 12.

⁴
"A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, I (March, 1913), 200.

movement; Miss Lowell, however, was eager to take over the leadership of the new group in 1914. The beginning of her campaign is summarized by Hughes in the following passage:

Miss Lowell had met some of these poets before, on her previous visit to London in the summer of 1913, and she had contributed one poem to Des Imagistes. In other words, she knew what was going on, and what imagism was, although until her 1913 visit to London her own poetry had been entirely of the conventional rime-and-meter sort. . . . But at the time of her 1914 visit, she was wholeheartedly in favor of technical experimentation and innovation, and she set herself the task of "selling" the new poetry to the world, at least to the American world. It was an opportunity which in her astuteness she could not overlook. She envisaged herself in a triple role: first, as one of the principal poets of the group; second, as business agent for the others; third, as critical interpreter of the new poetry in America. To say that she filled all three roles with reasonable success is to state an absolute fact.⁵

Amy Lowell and Ezra Pound differed considerably in poetic tastes, but the final break between them came about over the representation of the various poets in the next anthology. According to Damon "her scheme was that each of the poets elect should be allowed equal space in the next anthology. But such a scheme would dispossess Pound, in some measure, of his anonymous editorship."⁶ She quickly managed to win the other poets over to her side, and Pound withdrew from the group. Since Pound had only coined the name "Imagiste," a minor change was sufficient to avoid any charge of plagiarism.

⁵
Op. cit., pp. 35-36.

⁶
S. Foster Damon, Amy Lowell: A Chronicle, p. 237.

The group, therefore, dropped the final e from the French and used the word "Imagist" in the title of their new anthology, Some Imagist Poets. Furthermore, by including "some" in this title, they did not exclude Pound from the school.

When Miss Lowell returned to the United States in 1914, she brought with her the manuscript of Some Imagist Poets and signed a contract for the group with Houghton Mifflin for it and two other anthologies. Six poets, three Americans and three Englishmen, made equal contributions to these three books, published in 1915, 1916, and 1917. They are Richard Aldington, "H. D.," John Gould Fletcher, F. S. Flint, D. H. Lawrence, and Amy Lowell. Written by Richard Aldington and revised by Amy Lowell,⁷ the preface to the 1915 publication points out that the arrangement of this anthology differs from that of the earlier Des Imagistes:

Instead of an arbitrary selection by an editor, each poet has been permitted to represent himself by the work he considers his best, the only stipulation being that it should not yet have appeared in book form. A sort of informal committee--consisting of more than half the authors here represented--have arranged the book and decided what should be printed and what omitted, but, as a general rule, the poets have been allowed absolute freedom in this direction, limitations of space only being imposed upon them. Also, to avoid any appearance of precedence, they have been put in alphabetical order.⁸

⁷ Hughes, op. cit., p. 39.

⁸ Some Imagist Poets, 1915, pp. v-vi.

In this same preface the official Imagist credo was presented for the first time to help the public better understand the aims of the movement:

The poets in this volume do not represent a clique. Several of them are personally unknown to the others, but they are united by certain common principles, arrived at independently. These principles are not new; they have fallen into desuetude. They are the essentials of all great poetry, indeed of all great literature, and they are simply these:--

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word.

2. To create new rhythms--as the expression of new moods--and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon "free-verse" as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as for a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free-verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea.

3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. It is not good art to write badly about aeroplanes and automobiles; nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old-fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911.

4. To present an image (hence the name: "Imagist"). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.

5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.

6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry.

The subject of free-verse is too complicated to be discussed here. We may say briefly, that we attach the term to all that increasing amount of writing whose cadence is more marked, more definite, and closer knit than that of prose, but which is not so violently

nor so obviously accented as the so-called "regular-verse."⁹

In the preface to Some Imagist Poets, 1916, Amy Lowell attempted to clear up certain misunderstandings that had arisen and to give a detailed explanation of vers libre, or "unrhymed cadence" as she preferred to call it. In the first place she pointed out that Imagism was more than a mere presentation of pictures:

"Imagism" refers to the manner of presentation, not to the subject. It means a clear presentation of whatever the author wishes to convey. Now he may wish to convey a mood of indecision, in which case the poem should be indecisive; he may wish to bring before his reader the constantly shifting and changing lights over a landscape, or the varying attitudes of mind of a person under strong emotion, then his poem must shift and change to present this clearly. The "exact" word does not mean the word which exactly describes the object in itself, it means the "exact" word which brings the effect of that object before the reader as it presented itself to the poet's mind at the time of writing the poem. Imagists deal but little with similes, although much of their poetry is metaphorical. The reason for this is that while acknowledging the figure to be an integral part of all poetry, they feel that the constant imposing of one figure upon another in the same poem blurs the central effect.¹⁰

Having mentioned that the immediate prototype of Imagism is to be found in Europe rather than in England or America, Miss Lowell explains why this poetry had seemed so strange to reviewers and readers:

The crux of the situation is just here. It is

⁹ Ibid., pp. vi-viii.

¹⁰ Some Imagist Poets, 1916, pp. v-vi.

in the idiom employed. Imagism asks to be judged by different standards from those employed in Nineteenth-Century art. It is small wonder that Imagist poetry should be incomprehensible to men whose sole touchstone for art is the literature of one country for a period of four centuries. And it is an illuminating fact that among poets and men conversant with many poetic idioms, Imagism is rarely misconceived. They may not agree with us, but they do not misunderstand us.¹¹

The 1916 preface ends with a discussion of free verse, which was the main verse pattern used by the Imagists. Miss Lowell says that it is this style of writing rather than the subject matter covered which makes their poetry hard to understand:

All nations have laws of prosody, which undergo changes from time to time. The laws of English metrical prosody are well known to every one concerned with the subject. But that is only one form of prosody. . . . That the Imagists base much of their poetry upon cadence and not upon metre makes them neither good nor bad. And no one realizes more than they that no theories nor rules make poetry. They claim for their work only that it is sincere.

It is this very fact of "cadence" which has misled so many reviewers, until some have been betrayed into saying that the Imagists discard rhythm, when rhythm is the most important quality in their technique. The definition of vers libre is--a verse-form based upon cadence. Now cadence in music is one thing, cadence in poetry quite another, since we are not dealing with tone but with rhythm. It is the sense of perfect balance of flow and rhythm.¹²

In Some Imagist Poets, 1917 there is only a very brief preface in which the group states that it is their last anthology. Shortly after the publication of this book Amy

¹¹
Ibid., p. vii.

¹²
Ibid., pp. viii-ix.

Lowell commented that the series had done its work: "These three little books are the germ, the nucleus, of the school; its spreading out, its amplification, must be sought in the published work of the individual members of the group."¹³

In 1930 another Imagist Anthology was published, but there is really no connection between this book and the earlier anthologies of Imagist poetry. Hughes says that this book

. . . has helped to revive interest in imagism as a movement, though the intention of the volume is not in the least propagandist. Its purpose is merely to present in friendly juxtaposition specimens of recent work by various poets who have at one time or another marched under the imagist banner.¹⁴

At the time of the first publication of Some Imagist Poets America was ready for some change in poetry; in fact, the United States accepted Imagism much more readily than did England. Damon says that Amy Lowell, however, "never suspected the thunderstorms of controversy over the Imagist credo that were to recur and reverberate for several years."¹⁵ Hoping only for a mild success, she had not foreseen any such intellectual warfare. Nevertheless she launched a campaign which she continued for several years. Soon the new poetry was spreading fast; and free verse, with its

¹³ Tendencies in Modern American Poetry, p. 255.

¹⁴ Op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁵ Op. cit., p. 304.

newer and more personal rhythms, suddenly had become popular.

Damon comments that Miss Lowell would have been remembered for her promotion of Imagism and the new poetry in general even if she had written no poetry herself:

Of course she did not do this single-handed; she was merely the chief spokesman for a national art. Advertising breaks down after a while, if the goods do not come up to specifications. Her championing of Imagism succeeded, where a hundred imitative movements since have failed, because the principles of Imagism were the results of the lengthy observations and arguments of many persons. The poets were already writing, the poetry magazines were beginning to appear, and the New Poetry was already well rooted when Amy Lowell took charge. But it was the moment for somebody who combined creative ability, critical integrity, and a powerful personality to take the leadership. Amy Lowell was the person who assumed the leadership.

The result was a general rejuvenation of American literature. Even those who despised Free Verse and Imagism found themselves writing with greater clarity and conciseness and intensity and truthfulness.¹⁶

In this same connection Louis Untermeyer says: "Never has there been a leadership like Amy's. She used every form of persuasion and weapon."¹⁷

In concluding a discussion of the Imagist movement, it is difficult to set dates for its beginning and end. Ezra Pound's publication on the four cardinal principles of Imagism in the March, 1913, issue of Poetry marks the beginning

¹⁶

Ibid., p. 727.

¹⁷

"Storm Center in Brookline," Harper's, CLXXIX (August, 1939), 269.

of the organized movement. It is not so easy, however, to establish the closing date. According to Hughes the publication of the fourth Imagist anthology in 1917 was the end of the actual movement, "although certain of the imagist poets have continued to write in the imagist manner, and a great many of their contemporaries and successors have done so too."¹⁸

Even though Amy Lowell "continually violated the Imagist manifesto and extended her work far beyond its tenets,"¹⁹ Imagism was the chief influence on her poetry and changed the course of her writing when she first joined the group. Because of that influence this chapter has been devoted to a summary of the Imagist movement.

¹⁸

Op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁹

Untermeyer, op. cit., p. 270.

CHAPTER III

THE AESTHETICS OF AMY LOWELL

Since Amy Lowell not only wrote poetry but also did a considerable amount of criticism, one finds numerous comments on her aesthetic beliefs, especially regarding poetry, in her critical essays and books, in the prefaces to volumes of poetry, and in many of her letters. A few theories, however, she frequently repeats: art is primarily important as an entity in itself; true art is the desire of man to express himself; art is the climax of civilization and the only thing which endures; and art is the main reason for poetry. In the first part of this chapter these four theories on the nature of art and poetry will be discussed, and whenever possible quotations from Miss Lowell's own writing will be used. The last section of the chapter will be devoted to a summary of her beliefs concerning the process of creation.

Before Miss Lowell's main aesthetic concepts are taken up, some of the forces that influenced their formulation will be considered. In the essay, "Poetry, Imagination, and Education," she says that she was saved from "the clutches of ignorant and unimaginative Academia" through her early discovery of Leigh Hunt's Imagination and Fancy:

I read it over and over, and then I turned to the works of the poets referred to, and tried to read

them by the light of the new aesthetic perception I had learnt from Hunt.

So engulfed in this new pursuit was I, that I used to inveigle my schoolmates up to my room and read them long stretches of Shelley, and Keats, and Coleridge, and Beaumont and Fletcher. Guided by Hunt, I found a new Shakespeare, one of whom I had never dreamed. . .

I have often thought that in this book of Leigh Hunt's we have an excellent text-book for what should be the proper teaching of literature, and especially poetry. Poetry is an art, and to emphasize anything else is to deny its true function.¹

No doubt certain ideas from the French went into her philosophy of poetry; and she openly acknowledged her indebtedness to the other Imagists and to T. E. Hulme, an aesthetic philosopher, who was the leading theorist of this group. Also readily apparent in Miss Lowell's art is the influence of Keats.

Now that this brief comment on influences is completed, the discussion of Miss Lowell's main aesthetic theories will be taken up. Her idea that a work of art is, first of all, important in itself--an idea frequently repeated--will be considered first. In a letter written to Albert Mordell in 1916, she stresses this belief:

. . . Apparently poetry is chiefly valuable to you on the ethical side. To me it is chiefly valuable on the aesthetic side. . .

I think we must admit, however, that there is a something which we call art which is as undefinable as love or patriotism or any of the moving forces of the world, and which has an inspiring and civilizing effect and is one of the most worthy projects to which

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Poetry and Poets, pp. 53-54.

man can devote himself. This thing called art is primarily important because of being an organic entity--a thing in itself, for itself, and by itself--as important to us as the universe in which we live, and as detached. At the same time it contains many minor importances for us. Among other things, the teaching of life, which you rate so highly; the solace of beauty; the inspiration of knowledge.²

Another of her theories is that art "is the desire of a man to express himself, to record the reactions of his personality to the world he lives in."³ Of course self-expression is one of the fundamental urges, whether it be through the creation or the enjoyment of some form of art or the participation in some activity. In the essay, "Why We Should Read Poetry,"⁴ Miss Lowell points out that asking why one should read poetry would be just as foolish as asking why one should eat. If man lived for the purely material things, many of the shops and organizations, including our baseball parks, would go out of existence. She goes on to illustrate this point by saying that baseball is "but a superb epic of man's swiftness and sureness" and that the men who watch are carried out of themselves into a romantic world, filled with physical force, emotion, and imagination:

This is what poetry really is. It is the height

² As quoted in S. Foster Damon, Amy Lowell: A Chronicle, p. 360.

³ Amy Lowell, Tendencies in Modern American Poetry, p. 7.

⁴ Poetry and Poets, pp. 3-9.

and quintessence of emotion, of every sort of emotion. But it is always somebody feeling something at white heat, and it is as vital as the description of a battle would be, told by a soldier who had been in it.⁵

According to Miss Lowell we should read poetry because by doing so we can discover man in his various moods and, in turn, get a certain feeling of self-expression and satisfaction.

Art as the chief aim and climax of civilization is still another of Amy Lowell's aesthetic concepts, and in Can Grande's Castle particularly is this idea emphasized. Damon comments that especially in "The Bronze Horses," one of the four long poems in this book, she

. . . accepts Brooks Adams's theory that civilizations arise cyclically upon economic success, then decay as the racial energy runs out; she also accepts Henry Adams's theory that international crises recur more and more frequently as the speed of history accelerates. But Amy Lowell, in organizing and completing her theory, won a place of her own amongst the historical philosophers. To her, art was life's highest achievement and its only permanence--it was almost civilization itself. The economic system is the root, the popular pleasures are the transient flower, and the arts are the seed-bearing fruit. In giving art this importance, she was unknowingly reviving, secularizing, and extending the old Puritan theory that man was created for the purpose of being happy, and that individual happiness was proof of a life in accord with the will of God.⁶

"The Bronze Horses," in its enormous conception, exemplifies the permanence of art. Four different civilizations

⁵
Ibid., p. 4.

⁶
Op. cit., p. 469.

are presented, each of which is destroyed by greed and war; but the bronze horses, representing the aesthetic, always come through the period of destruction unharmed. The last of these civilizations is represented by Venice in 1915, when the horses are moved for safety to Rome:

Down the canal, old, beautiful horses, pride of Venice, of Constantinople, of Rome. Wars bite you with their little flames and pass away, but roses and oleanders strew their petals before your going, and you move like a constellation in a space of crimson stars.

So the horses float along the canal, between barred and shuttered palaces, splendid against marble walls in the fire of the sun.⁷

Miss Lowell states the same belief, but somewhat differently, in "Guns as Keys: and the Great Gate Swings":

For centuries men have pursued the will-o'-the-wisp--trade. And they have got--what? All civilization weighed in two penny scales and fastened with string. A sailing planet packed in dry-goods box. Knocks, and shocks, and blocks of extended knowledge, contended for and won. Cloves and nutmegs, and science stowed among the grains. Your gains are not in silver, mariners, but in the songs of violins, and the thin voices whispering through printed books.⁸

In presenting the last of her main aesthetic theories-- art as the reason for the creation and existence of poetry-- a section from a letter, written to Archibald MacLeish in 1925 concerning his opinion of Legends, will be quoted first:

With your contention that my work stands for art and that art is the principal reason for poetry,

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Amy Lowell, Can Grande's Castle, p. 232.

8

Ibid., p. 71.

that it should be regarded as an art and not as a splashing round of emotion, I entirely agree, and I am thankful that you took the attitude you did and left out all the stuff and nonsense about vers libre or anything in the line of form which is, of course, not the point.⁹

Even though Miss Lowell argues that a work of art is great only because of its aesthetic values, she insists that its very aestheticism is determined by its sincerity and by the strength of its roots, which must spring from real life. Posterity, according to her, is interested only in the beauty and simplicity of poetry as a work of art and cares nothing for the beliefs that prompted the author to write.¹⁰ But she adds that the simplicity of the poet is far different from the primitive simplicity of man: "If poetry were really democratic it would not be considered so important. It is just because so few can really produce it that it always remains one of the transcendent activities of humanity."¹¹

In a letter to Professor Allan Abbott, of Columbia, she expresses a similar idea in connection with her disapproval of art for the masses:

I hope that the great fallacy of the democratisation of the arts will sometime give place to a more reasonable outlook on the subject, and we shall no

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As quoted in Damon, op. cit., p. 688.

10

Tendencies in Modern American Poetry, p. vi.

11

From a letter to Marguerite Wilkinson as quoted in Damon, op. cit., pp. 529-530.

longer be surprised at failures (among students) such as you have encountered, but rather place the arts in the unique and elevated position where they should naturally be, and so regard those persons, capable of development in them, as they used to be regarded, namely, as persons apart and, in their own particular region, better equipped than the mass of mankind.¹²

Considering Amy Lowell's intellectual and cultural background, one would expect her to have had such an attitude toward the arts.

There is an interesting comment on the poet and his art during the time of war to be found in one of Miss Lowell's letters to John Gould Fletcher:

Nor must you think that you are not useful merely because you are a poet and not a soldier. As a matter of fact, I believe that the world needs poetry more than it ever needed it. It is absolutely necessary to keep the beautiful going, and because most people are lost in the maelstrom which the war brings, makes the poets of more value because to them is entrusted the duty of keeping poetry alive in a world which for the moment has little sympathy in it.¹³

In concluding the discussion of the aesthetic theory of poetry as art, a few of Miss Lowell's ideas on the necessity of oral presentation will be considered. "Poetry," she writes, "is as much an art to be heard as is music, if we could only get people to understand the fact."¹⁴ She points out that poetry, which has much in common with oratorical

¹² As quoted in Damon, op. cit., pp. 529-30.

¹³ As quoted in Damon, op. cit., p. 415.

¹⁴ Poetry and Poets, p. 10.

prose, in that both are intended to be heard, has suffered more from printing than has any other art. According to Miss Lowell poetry will not come into its "Paradise" until carefully trained readers make a business of interpretation, and she argues that poetry requires professional interpretation, for "it is only one reader out of a hundred (and I think that percentage is rather high than otherwise) who can possibly get all the beauty out of a poem."¹⁵ The reader, however, must not act out the poem and, by so doing, destroy the listener's mental vision of the piece itself.

In the preceding pages a summary of Amy Lowell's purely aesthetic beliefs has been made. The last section of the chapter, however, will be devoted to her concept of the creative process, about which she had some rather definite convictions. Near the beginning of her writing career she made the following remarks about the poet's having to learn his art:

No one expects a man to make a chair without first learning how, but there is a popular impression that the poet is born, not made, and that his verses burst from his overflowing heart of themselves. As a matter of fact, the poet must learn his trade in the same manner, and with the same painstaking care, as the cabinet-maker. His heart may overflow with high thoughts and sparkling fancies, but if he cannot convey them to his reader by

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Ibid., p. 13.

means of the written word he has no claim to be considered a poet. A workman may be pardoned, therefore, for spending a few moments to explain and describe the technique of his trade. A work of beauty which cannot stand an intimate examination is a poor and jerry-built thing.¹⁶

Speaking of the mystery of creation, which she does not claim to understand entirely, she considers a poet to be something like a radio aerial, but actually more than an aerial, for he possesses the ability of transmuting the messages he receives into patterns called poems.¹⁷

The external stimulus which inspired a poem, according to Miss Lowell, sometimes can be recalled. The subconscious influence, however, is quite another matter, but she says that at times she was able even to witness or analyze the subconscious functioning of her mind. She would drop her subject into her subconscious, and then later, sometimes days, sometimes months, the poem would be "there." In the case of very short pieces often an instant might be sufficient for gestation.

Discussing her actual process of composing, she says that she could hear toneless pronouncing of words:

The words seem to be pronounced in my head, but with nobody speaking them. This is an effect with which I am familiar, for I always hear words even when I am reading to myself, and still more when I am writing. In writing, I frequently stop to read aloud

¹⁶

Sword Blades and Poppy Seed, p. vii.

¹⁷

Poetry and Poets, pp. 24-25.

what I have written, although this is really hardly necessary, so clearly do the words sound in my head.¹⁸

But she adds that the subconscious mind is not always a dependable helper and cannot be trusted for indefinite periods of creation:

Often he will strike work at some critical point and not another word is to be got out of him. Here is where the conscious training of the poet comes in, for he must fill in what the subconscious has left, and fill it in as much in the key of the rest as possible. Every long poem is sprinkled with these lacunae; hence the innumerable rewritings which most poems undergo. Sometimes the sly subconscious partner will take pity on the struggling poet and return to his assistance; sometimes he will have nothing to do with that particular passage again. This is the reason that a poet must be both born and made. . . Of the many first manuscript drafts of great poets that have passed through my hands in the last twenty-five years, I have seen none without its share of putty, and the one of all most worked over is Keats's 'The Eve of St. Agnes.'¹⁹

Miss Lowell never denied a poem when it came, but always dropped whatever she was doing to turn to the composition of the piece. Instead of composing in her head, as a rule she found paper and pencil. "It seems," she writes, "as though the simple gazing at a piece of blank paper hypnotized me into an awareness of the subconscious."²⁰ Her state of semi-trance lasted not only through the writing

¹⁸

Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁹

Ibid., pp. 26-27.

²⁰

Ibid., p. 28.

of short pieces but also could be restored after an interruption in longer compositions. She says that anyone who is not a poet cannot realize the agony of creating a poem:

Every nerve, even every muscle, seems strained to the breaking point. The poem will not be denied, to refuse to write it would be a greater torture. It tears its way out of the brain, splintering and breaking its passage, and leaves that organ in the state of a jelly-fish when the task is done. And yet to have no poem to write is the worst state of all. Truly a poet's life is not a happy one. . . . Does a man create with his blood and sinews, and suffer in so doing? If he does not, give no heed to his works, they are still-born.²¹

Writing to D. H. Lawrence in 1921, she mentions her desire to improve her technique of creation:

Sometimes I wonder whether I shall live long enough, and grow enough, to be able to put into my poetry what I want to have there. I don't know, one can only live and try to go on growing. The technique of poetry is easy, very easy to any one born that way; life is not easy, and it is still less simple to express in words the real throb, and misery, and gusto which it has. That is what you do, and that is what I wish I could learn of you.²²

In the summer of 1922 Professor Walter V. Bingham, at that time head of the psychology department of the Carnegie Institute at Pittsburgh, asked Miss Lowell to act as his subject in a study of the creation of poetry. She finally refused, however, because she felt that her writing was too entangled with her life for her to ever separate the two.

²¹ John Keats, I, 303.

²² As quoted in Damon, op. cit., p. 573.

Also she feared that the publication of such an analysis might prove harmful to her future writing. This incident was the stimulus for her poem, "To a Gentleman Who Wanted to See the First Drafts of My Poems in the Interests of Psychological Research into the Workings of the Creative Mind." It is the first selection in Ballads for Sale.

The above discussion of Amy Lowell's creative process has been included in this chapter because of its bearing on the general subject of her poetic technique, even though such material ordinarily might not be included with purely aesthetic theories.

In concluding the chapter the following paragraphs from Damon are offered as a summary of Miss Lowell's philosophy of art:

Her attitude towards the arts was actually a contribution to aesthetic philosophy. Taking for granted that happiness was the test of a successful life or civilization, she placed the higher pleasures--the arts--as the purpose and the climax of our existence. This conviction of hers was so complete that she hardly bothered to labor so obvious a point; but it is the implication and trend that lay behind all her aesthetic dicta. . .

She was far more explicit about her conceptions of poetry. It was the expression of experience, to which nothing human was alien; and to express experience more effectively, she extended the bounds of rhythm and form. She did not seek for originality in her theory, but for fundamentals, which she was content to clarify and reaffirm.²³

CHAPTER IV

FREE VERSE AND POLYPHONIC PROSE

Experimentation was always a passion with Miss Lowell; and in reading through her volumes of poetry, a person "is dazzled with the enormous output, the incredible variety of themes, the technical facility."¹ New England, flowers and nature, moon symbolism, John Keats, Japanese and Chinese subjects, historical material, legends, personal tragedy, war--these themes suggest the diversity of her subject matter. Her versification includes polyphonic prose, free verse, the Japanese hokku, rhymed couplets, the Chaucerian stanza, blank verse, the sonnet form, and other effects in meter and rhyme. In fact, this very profusion is one of the main weaknesses of her writing; no unifying attitude or central conception is evident in her complete works. Certain devices or techniques, however, do stand out; namely, symbolism, imagism, "colorism," and, in versification, free verse and polyphonic prose.

This chapter on Miss Lowell's versification, therefore, will be limited to these two principal forms, which she used for the greater part of her writing. Her use of the

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Alfred Kreymborg, A History of American Poetry, p. 356.

conventional forms will not be discussed. Analyses of various selections of free verse and polyphonic prose will be included in the discussion. The other three devices mentioned above will be taken up in Chapter V.

Amy Lowell did much in the way of interpreting free verse, or vers libre as it is sometimes called, for the American public and carried out varied experiments with it. Her first poems in this form are found in Sword Blades and Poppy Seed, in the preface of which she gives the following explanation of her new form:

Many poems in this volume are written in what the French call "vers libre," a nomenclature more suited to French use and to French versification than to ours. I prefer to call them poems in "unrhymed cadence," for that conveys their exact meaning to an English ear. They are built upon "organic rhythm," or the rhythm of the speaking voice with its necessity for breathing, rather than upon a strict metrical system. They differ from ordinary prose rhythms by being more curved, and containing more stress. The stress, and exceedingly marked curve, of any regular metre is easily perceived. These poems, built upon cadence, are more subtle, but the laws they follow are not less fixed. Merely chopping prose lines into lengths does not produce cadence, it is constructed upon mathematical and absolute laws of balance and time. In the preface to his "Poems," Henley speaks of "those unrhyming rhythms in which I had tried to quintessentialize, as (I believe) one scarce can do in rhyme." The desire to "quintessentialize," to head-up an emotion until it burns white-hot, seems to be an integral part of the modern temper, and certainly "unrhymed cadence" is unique in its power of expressing this.²

In the preface to Some Imagist Poets, 1916 free verse

is defined as a verse form based on cadence rather than on conventional meter. This cadence is more marked and definite than that of prose but is not so obviously or violently accented as regular verse. Miss Lowell points out that the cadence of poetry is quite different from the cadence of music, in that the first deals with rhythm rather than tone. She says that there must be a sense of perfect balance of flow and rhythm in free verse:

Not only must the syllables so fall as to increase and continue the movement, but the whole poem must be as rounded and recurring as the circular swing of a balanced pendulum. It can be fast or slow, it may even jerk, but this perfect swing it must have, even its jerks must follow the central movement.³

To illustrate this movement pattern Miss Lowell uses the task of walking around a large circle. A person is allowed two minutes which he would just consume if he walked around the circle at a normal pace. In order to make the task a little more interesting, however, he must complete each half of the walk in exactly one minute. Only this time restriction is placed upon him. He may creep along in the beginning, run at top speed to reach the half-way mark at the end of the first minute, and then walk steadily around the rest of the circle. Or he may use any combination of fast, slow, and steady movements, just so long as

³ Some Imagist Poets, 1916, p. ix.

he completes each half of the circle in a minute.

The unit in free verse, according to Miss Lowell, is the strophe rather than the foot, the number of syllables, or the line. The strophe, which may be the whole poem or only a part, is a complete circle. The Greek "strophe" was that part of the poem which was spoken while the chorus was making one circle around the altar set up in the center of the theater; hence the simile of the circle. "Of course the circle need not always be the same size," says Miss Lowell, "nor need the times allowed to negotiate it be always the same."⁴ Such a statement makes allowance for any number of variations. Also additional circles or movements may be added to the poem so long as each movement completes itself and has some logical connection with the others.

Perhaps the following will be a more specific definition of the strophe: a group of words which round themselves satisfactorily to the ear. In a short poem this rounding may take place only at the end; thus the poem is a single unit with lines of varying lengths making up the strophe. Longer poems, however, are made up of several strophes.

Free verse at its best is essentially strophic, because it is the larger rhythms of the strophe which hold it together. Since regular verse is also strophic, the two types

⁴
Ibid., p. x.

have this in common. There is a difference, however; in regular verse the metrical lines are the main source of the minor rhythms; in the other form the lines can be varied in any way desired.

Amy Lowell warns, however, that the rhythm of a cadenced poem will be felt only when it is read aloud:

To understand vers libre, one must abandon all desire to find in it the even rhythm of metrical feet. One must allow the lines to flow as they will when read aloud by an intelligent reader. Then new rhythms will become evident--satisfying and delightful. For this poetry definitely harks back to the old oral tradition; it is written to be spoken. For we believe that poetry is a spoken, not a written art.⁵

In conventional verse some sense of rhythm can be gained from seeing the even pattern of metrical lines; but since free verse is composed of irregular ones, oral presentation is absolutely necessary for clear comprehension.

In certain selections in Men, Women and Ghosts she carries her experiments in free verse farther than she had in her previous writing. In the preface she explains her latest attempts to achieve new rhythms and suggests that many more effects can be worked out with free verse:

It has long been a favorite idea of mine that the rhythms of vers libre have not been sufficiently plumbed, that there is in them a power of variation which has never yet been brought to the light of experiment. I think it was the piano pieces of Debussy, with their strange likeness to short vers

⁵
"A Consideration of the New Poetry," North American Review, CCV (January, 1917), 107.

libre poems, which first showed me the close kinship of music and poetry, and there flashed into my mind the idea of using the movement of poetry in somewhat the same way that the musician uses the movement of music.

It was quite evident that this could never be done in the strict pattern of a metrical form, but the flowing, fluctuating rhythm of vers libre seemed to open the door to such an experiment. First, however, I considered the same method as applied to the more pronounced movements of natural objects. If the reader will turn to the poem, "A Roxbury Garden," he will find in the first two sections an attempt to give the circular movement of a hoop bowling along the ground, and the up and down, elliptical curve of a flying shuttlecock.

From these experiments, it is but a step to the flowing rhythm of music. In "The Cremona Violin," I have tried to give this flowing, changing rhythm to the parts in which the violin is being played. The effect is farther heightened, because the rest of the poem is written in the seven line Chaucerian stanza; and, by deserting this ordered pattern for the undulating line of vers libre, I hoped to produce something of the suave, continuous tone of a violin. Again, in the violin parts themselves, the movement constantly changes, as will be quite plain to any one reading these passages aloud.⁶

She continues by saying that she set a much harder job for herself in trying to transcribe the various movements of Stravinsky's "Three Pieces, 'Grotesques,' for String Quartet," but several musicians who read this poem considered the movement accurately done.

In concluding her discussion of the experimentation with free verse in Men, Women and Ghosts, Miss Lowell says: "These experiments lead me to believe that there is here much food for thought and matter for study, and I hope many

6

Men, Women and Ghosts, pp. vii-ix.

poets will follow me in opening up the still hardly explored possibilities of vers libre."7

Through the three Some Imagist Poets anthologies, with her explanatory prefaces, through her own volumes of poetry, and through speeches and essays Miss Lowell aroused widespread interest in the free verse movement. There was naturally much discussion and controversy over this apparently new and radical verse form. Although free verse at times contains rhyme, it is never metrical; and this absence of meter is the thing that disturbed the more conservative writers and critics. Being used to conventional rhyme and meter, most of them considered it a prose form rather than poetry. Still Amy Lowell, with a few followers, argued that it was "assuredly poetry." She says: "That it may dispense with rhyme, and must dispense with metre, does not affect its substance in the least. For no matter with what it dispenses, it retains that essential to all poetry: Rhythm."8 And it is with the rhythm and cadence of free verse that the following section of this chapter will deal; but it should be pointed out here that free verse is now generally accepted as a verse form, rather than as prose, and that in this paper it has been considered as such.

7
Ibid., p. ix.

8
Poetry and Poets, p. 23.

As representative of the majority opinion concerning the rhythms of free verse, the following summary by John Livingston Lowes is given:

The rhythms of vers libre in English, then, unless I am mistaken, are in large degree the rhythms of a certain type of modern rhythmic prose. But that is not an assertion that free verse is prose. There are differences which set the one off from the other. The prose from which I have culled my excerpts does not maintain unbrokenly the rhythms which I have shown it to possess. If it did, we should certainly hesitate to call it prose. The best free verse poems, on the other hand, do maintain these rhythms consistently. And that is an important difference: the rhythms which are occasional in one are persistent in the other. . . . And my reason for declining. . . . to ticket free verse as prose, is the fact that it deals with prose rhythms in a fashion which prose itself may not employ without ceasing to be prose. That is as far as I can, at the moment, see my way. . . . Vers libre is exploring the borderland between prose and verse. It is doing certain things which hitherto verse has done, and prose has not. It is doing certain other things which hitherto prose has done, and verse has not.⁹

There are a few critics, however, who maintain that free verse is not poetry. In fact, Hervey Allen was of such an opinion as late as 1927 after the main controversy was over. He says: "It is useless to insist that 'free verse' is a form. Verse and 'free' are in themselves antithetical ideas."¹⁰ He adds that this borderland between prose and poetry which is claimed for free verse is so narrow that a

⁹
Convention and Revolt in Poetry, pp. 280-281.

¹⁰
"Amy Lowell as a Poet," The Saturday Review of Literature, III (February 5, 1927), 568.

writer cannot stay within its bounds. Allen's criticism is not typical but is included merely to show the nature of the arguments against free verse as a form of poetry.

Harriet Monroe, in her book Poets and Their Art, makes numerous comments on the free verse movement, and according to her it has been primarily a plea from the poet for a personal rhythm and for independence in developing his most expressive form.¹¹ She points out that the vers-librists, just as certain other groups of American and English poets had done in the past, were striving for more freedom than was permitted by the laws:

The modern vers-librists, then--I use the word in the English-American, not the French sense--have fought for elbow-room, for greater freedom of movement in the bar, the line, the cadence, the strophe. In so far as they have written poetry, and not what Howells wittily called "shredded prose," their fight has availed to break down the grammarians' smug barriers and enrich the language with beautiful poems in a new, or at least newly recovered, mode.¹²

Miss Monroe states further that these experimenters were seeking more variety in rhythms, whether three-time or four-time, "through a freer action of syllables and rests within the bar, a more individual grouping of bars in lines, and a larger, more musical sweep of the rhythmic

¹¹ Poets and Their Art, pp. 299-300.

¹² Ibid., p. 293.

phrase across the barriers of bar and line."¹³

Concerning cadence, which is the essence of free verse, she makes an interesting observation:

On the basic rhythmic pattern, whatever it be, of any poem the poet weaves his larger cadences, the rhythmic phrase carrying the metric bars as a great wave carries ripples. Free verse has been called by Amy Lowell "cadence verse," but all poetry is cadence verse in this sense, that all poetry has a double rhythm, an overlay of sweeping cadences on the smaller patterns of time-unit bars.¹⁴

According to Miss Monroe "free verse has a wider range or expressiveness than the exact metrics so long in vogue, and probably, in the hands of masters, an equal range of beauty."¹⁵ She says that the free verse movement "has called typography to its aid as a legitimate emphasis--an aid which countless mere pretenders have invoked to make their 'shredded prose' look like poetry, thereby confusing a too casual public."¹⁶

The most thorough analysis of the rhythms of free verse, however, will be found in the results of experiments carried on by Dr. William Morrison Patterson and Amy Lowell. As part of these experiments Miss Lowell read certain selections, including "Oread" by "H. D." and her own piece,

¹³ Ibid., p. 294.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 298-299.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 301.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 300.

"Thompson's Lunch Room," into a sound-photographing machine. With the charts from this machine it was possible to determine in tenths of a second the time intervals between the main accents in the cadence. Dr. Patterson has explained some of his theories in two books, The Rhythms of Prose and The Making of Verse.

First, his distinction between verse and prose rhythms will be mentioned. In verse the rhythm is coincident; in prose it is syncopated:

This result is achieved through a system of tapping. For instance, repeat "Mary had a Little Lamb" and at the same time tap the rhythms of the stressed syllables with your finger on a table. It will be found that the tappings and stressed syllables exactly coincide. Now tap again and read any prose passage you like while you are doing it. You will find the syllables and stresses come every which way, sometimes on the beat, it is true, but more often before or after it, either directly between two taps or at varying distances from one or the other.¹⁷

Dr. Patterson agrees that there is a difference, though one of degree, between the rhythms of prose and free verse; but he adds (and Miss Lowell agrees with him) that free verse is best when the syncopating experience predominates--"when the 'cadences' follow each other in the magical manner and with the occult balance of good prose."¹⁸ He defines the

¹⁷
 Amy Lowell, "The Rhythms of Free Verse," The Dial, LXIV (January 17, 1918), 51.

¹⁸
 From a letter written by Dr. Patterson to Miss Lowell and quoted by her in the above article, p. 53.

"more inspired manifestations" of her free verse as "rhythmically self-conscious 'spaced prose.'"¹⁹

But Miss Lowell insists that the rhythms of prose and vers libre are distinctly different:

The returning cadence unit of vers libre has slight counterpart with the changing cadences of even the most rhythmic prose. Where the vers libre poem as a whole keeps to a single recurring psychological beat, the prose page or chapter conforms to no unit.²⁰

She says that it is not especially difficult to prove that the cadences of true vers libre differ from those of even the most highly developed "fluid prose."

And according to Miss Lowell there is a different "curve" in vers libre than in even the most rhythmical prose. Speaking of having read aloud certain passages of free verse, she says: "I felt cadence as a line rising to a certain height and then dropping away to mount again, farther on. I called this rising and falling line a 'curve.'"²¹

Through the use of time tests and tapping experiments, Dr. Patterson divided prose and verse into seven different types:²² metrical verse, unitary verse, polyphonic prose,

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 54.

²⁰ "The Rhythms of Free Verse," The Dial, LXIV (January 17, 1918), 52.

²¹ Ibid., p. 52.

²² Ibid., p. 55.

spaced prose, fluid prose, mosaics, and blends. Metrical verse, of course, is distinctly coincident in its rhythm, while the other types are progressively more syncopated.

Brief definitions of these types follow. Metrical verse depends upon the metrical foot for its rhythm. Unitary verse is a form in which equal time-intervals make up a succession of units; these time-intervals contain principal accents but are filled in with a variable number of less accented syllables. Polyphonic prose is a plastic form which employs free verse, meter, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, and return. In spaced prose the balancing of the broader groupings in prose rhythms is emphasized by printing phrases on separate lines. In fluid prose the rhythms are similar to spaced prose but less accentuated because of the solid printing. The mosaic is a form in which prose and verse, or several kinds of both forms, alternate successively. Finally, the blend combines effects not commonly used together.

Dr. Patterson labels Miss Lowell's "The Painter on Silk" unitary verse and says that there is a predominating coincidence in it which "stamps the experience psychologically as verse, regardless of the absence of metrical pattern in the consciousness of the listener."²³ He points out, how-

23

William Morrison Patterson, "New Verse and New Prose," The North American Review, CCVII (February, 1918), 259.

ever, that all free verse is not by any means unitary:

The vast majority of it falls into what we may term "spaced prose," "mosaics," and, occasionally, "blends." "Spaced prose," such as Miss Lowell's Reaping, produces predominately syncopating experience and differs from normal or "fluid prose" in that the printing of prose phrases on separate lines, or their delivery with correspondingly marked pauses, focuses our attention upon the rhythm as rhythm--especially the broader rhythmical balance of the phrases against each other.²⁴

Finally, Patterson says that with especially good prose it is possible to space phrases on separate lines and obtain "something which is not to be distinguished from the best free verse."²⁵

Now that we have considered the various characteristics of free verse, certain selections of this form will be analyzed in an effort to determine the actual nature of its rhythms and larger cadences.

Miss Lowell's analysis of "Oread" by "H. D." will be presented first. She divides the poem into five main cadences, which are further subdivided within each line.

"Oread" is given below:

Whirl up / sea-- /
Whirl / your pointed pines, /
Splash / your great pines / on our rocks, /

²⁴

²⁵ Ibid., p. 262.

²⁵ From the Patterson letter quoted by Amy Lowell in "The Rhythms of Free Verse," The Dial, LXIV (January 17, 1913), 54.

Hurl / your green over us, /
Cover us / with your pools / of fir. /²⁶

Miss Lowell says that these cadences are made up of time units which are in no way syllabic and that the number of syllables to each unit is immaterial:

The words must be hurried or delayed in reading to fill out the swing, that is all. The time units are also an irregular measurement within the main cadences. Some of the cadences are made up of two such units, some three, and, in the fourth line, the last two syllables are in the nature of a feminine ending, in that they are really an unaccented or suppressed part of the first time unit of the fifth line.²⁷

Dr. Patterson's sound-photographing machine recorded intervals between chief accents in tenths of a second, and the following figures show the result of Miss Lowell's reading of "Oread": 13--22--15--24--13--13--19--13--15--13. She explains these results in this way:

It will here be seen that the greatest variation of time length of unit is 11/10, or that between a 13/10 second and a 24/10. While, as Dr. Patterson pointed out, the interval 13/10 appears five times in this short poem.

Of course, no one in reading the poem would have such measurements in mind. They were recorded by a scientific instrument while the poem was being read in a perfectly simple and natural manner, but they are interesting for purposes of analysis.

The cadences of vers libre are not all so simple as this. But for that very reason I selected this to illustrate upon. No matter how changing and subtle, it is upon this principle that all vers libre is constructed.²⁸

²⁶

Tendencies in Modern American Poetry, p. 265.

²⁷

Ibid., p. 264.

²⁸

Ibid., pp. 265-266.

According to Dr. Patterson the first four intervals of "Oread" show acceleration and retarding to the extent that the sequence is a prose experience.²⁹

Now three of Amy Lowell's own poems, either in whole or in part, will be analyzed to determine the rhythms. The first two, "The Painter on Silk" and "Reaping," are taken from Men, Women and Ghosts, because in this book she did a great deal of experimentating with the free verse form. "Lilacs," found in What's O'clock, is the third piece chosen for analysis. It is representative of the perfection of her later free verse.

Examining "The Painter on Silk," one finds that its rhythm is much more pronounced than is the rhythm of some of Miss Lowell's other free verse poems. Dr. Patterson labels it "unitary verse" and says that in this poem Amy Lowell chants "with the vigorous sense of 'swing' which is one of her undeniable gifts."³⁰ He points out that the equality of these time intervals, however, is not dead but quite elastic and alive because of the swinging tempo in the cadence.

There are five strophes or stanzas in the poem. Each of these strophes is a little circle within itself but at the same time blends in with the other circles and helps complete

29

Amy Lowell, "The Rhythms of Free Verse," The Dial, LXIV (January 17, 1918), 53.

30

"New Verse and New Prose," The North American Review, CCVII (February, 1918), 257.

the over-all swing of the poem. Each strophe constitutes a main cadence, which is subdivided by lines. Within some of the lines there is still further subdivision. The main element, however, which gives this poem its rhythm is the definite pattern of the stressed words or syllables. These stresses will be indicated by a long mark over the accented syllables. The complete poem follows:

There was a man
Who made his living
By painting roses
Upon silk.

He sat in an upper chamber
And painted,
And the noises of the street
Meant nothing to him.

When he heard bugles, and fifes, and drums,
He thought of red, and yellow, and white roses
Bursting in the sunshine,
And smiled as he worked.

He thought only of roses,
And silk.
When he could get no more silk
He stopped painting
And only thought
Of roses.

The day the conquerors
Entered the city,
The old man
Lay dying.
He heard the bugles and drums,
And wished he could paint the roses
Bursting into sound.³¹

While the rhythm in "The Painter on Silk" follows a definite pattern, this is not true in "Reaping." In this second poem, a portion of which is given below, the rhythm is more like that of prose than of verse. In fact, Dr. Patterson labels this poem "spaced prose."³² Still the printing of the prose phrases on separate lines and the pauses which these divisions give in oral delivery create a rhythm that is more pronounced than the rhythm in regular prose. The first twenty-four lines of "Reaping" follow:

You want to know what's the matter with me, do yer?
 My! ain't men blinder'n moles?
 It ain't nothin' new, be sure o' that.
 Why, ef you'd had eyes you'd ha' seed
 Me changin' under your very nose,
 Each day a little diff'rent.
 But you never see nothin', you don't.
 Don't touch me Jake,
 Don't you dars't to touch me,
 I ain't in no humour.
 That's what's come over me;
 Jest a change clear through.
 You lay still, an' I'll tell yer,
 I've had it on my mind to tell yer
 Fer some time.
 It's a strain livin' a lie from mornin' till night,
 An' I'm goin' to put an end to it right now.
 An' don't make any mistake about one thing,
 When I married yer I loved yer.
 Why, your voice 'ud make
 Me go hot and cold all over,
 An' your kisses most stopped my heart from beatin'.
 Lord! I was a silly fool,
 But that's the way 'twas.³³

³² Op. cit., p. 262.

³³ Men, Women and Ghosts, pp. 253-254.

The last sample of free verse to be considered is a portion of "Lilacs." This poem, which is included in What's O'clock, one of Miss Lowell's later books, is an excellent illustration of her use of long, flowing cadences. It is given here as one of the best examples of her free verse. The poem is made up of three main divisions, containing fifty-two, forty-two, and fifteen lines, respectively. Within these large divisions or strophes there are numerous subdivisions, which move gracefully from one to another and contribute to the over-all recurring rhythm of the strophe. In fact, it is this larger rhythm of the strophe which holds free verse together. The main divisions, each of which is a complete movement in itself, vary in length but have similar rhythm patterns, which repeat each other and give a single spherical effect to the poem. Given below are thirty-four lines of the first division of "Lilacs" and all of the last one, which should be enough of the poem to give an accurate picture of its total effect:

Lilacs,
 False blue,
 White,
 Purple,
 Colour of lilac,
 Your great puffs of flowers
 Are everywhere in this my New England;
 Among your heart-shaped leaves
 Orange orioles hop like music-box birds and sing
 Their little weak soft songs;
 In the crooks of your branches
 The bright eyes of song sparrows sitting on spotted eggs
 Peer restlessly through the light and shadow
 Of all Springs.

Lilacs in dooryards
 Holding quiet conversations with an early moon;
 Lilacs watching a deserted house
 Settling sideways into the grass of an old road;
 Lilacs, wind-beaten, staggering under a lopsided
 shock of bloom
 Above a cellar dug into a hill.
 You are everywhere.
 You were everywhere.
 You tapped the window when the preacher preached his
 sermon,
 And ran along the road beside the boy going to school.
 You stood by pasture-bars to give the cows good milking,
 You persuaded the housewife that her dish pan was of
 silver
 And her husband an image of pure gold.

 . . .
 You are of the green sea,
 And of the stone hills which reach a long distance.
 You are of elm-shaded streets with little shops
 where they sell kites and marbles,
 You are of great parks where everyone walks and no-
 body is at home.
 You cover the blind sides of greenhouses
 And lean over the top to say a hurry-word through
 the glass
 To your friends, the grapes, inside.
 . . .

Lilacs,
 False blue,
 White,
 Purple,
 Colour of lilac.
 Heart-leaves of lilac all over New England,
 Roots of lilac under all the soil of New England,
 Lilac in me because I am New England,
 Because my roots are in it,
 Because my leaves are of it,
 Because my flowers are for it,
 Because it is my country
 And I speak to it of itself
 And sing of it with my own voice
 Since certainly it is mine.³⁴

In concluding this section on free verse, I should like to point out that Amy Lowell did the majority of her writing in this form. Of course many of these pieces have been forgotten, but a considerable number of them are really beautiful poetry and are still read and enjoyed. A few of these free verse poems which are considered among her best work will be mentioned here. In Sword Blades and Poppy Seed, "The Taxi" and "A Lady" and "In a Garden" are usually remembered. "Patterns," the first selection in Men, Women and Ghosts, is considered one of her most outstanding pieces by many critics. "Number 3 on the Docket" and "An Aquarium" are two other good selections in Men, Women and Ghosts. Another piece which is familiar to many is "Madonna of the Evening Flowers," included in Pictures of the Floating World. Other outstanding poems in this volume are the following: "Vernal Equinox," "Lacquer Prints," "Trees in Winter," and "The Garden by Moonlight." "Lilacs," which can be found in What's O'clock, is one of her best known poems. "Purple Grackles," "Mackerel Sky," "Texas," "The Sisters," "Fool o' the Moon," and "Night Clouds" are other good poems in this book. But of all her free verse, "Lilacs," "Madonna of the Evening Flowers," "Purple Grackles," and "Patterns" are perhaps first remembered.

Polyphonic prose, which has certain traits in common with free verse, will be taken up in the remaining part of

this chapter. Amy Lowell is considered the discover of this form, which is usually one of the first things in her work to be associated with her. Polyphonic prose, as Miss Lowell has said, employs meter, rhyme, return, assonance, and alliteration. "Polyphonic" means "many-voiced," and the word "prose" merely refers to the form in which it is printed, because polyphonic prose is by no means a typical prose form.

Miss Lowell got the idea for her new form from the Frenchman, Paul Fort. He used the alexandrine and sections of prose together in the same piece of writing but printed it as straight prose, leaving the reader to determine line divisions and rhythms. Fascinated with this typography, she started experimenting with a new form of her own. John Gould Fletcher, who suggested the name "polyphonic prose," makes the following comments on her experimentation and discovery:

It seemed to her that there must be some way of fusing together unrhymed vers libre and rhymed metrical patterns, giving the rich decorative quality of the one and the powerful conciseness of statement of the other. In short she was seeking some means whereby she might free herself, and the other poets after her, from a constant and dogmatic adherence to a single meter throughout a poem. In this respect, she was acting as the successor of Coleridge, Keats, Poe, who spent their lives trying to make English meter more flexible to mood and richer in sound effect. . .

She found it possible to vary the rhythm and metre of these strange new poems of hers almost at will, following the inner emotion of the thing she had to say. . .In short, here was the opportunity,

long sought, of displaying, within the limits of a single poem, all the resources of her art.³⁵

Miss Lowell mentions polyphonic prose in the prefaces of Sword Blades and Poppy Seed and Men, Women and Ghosts; but in her preface to Can Grande's Castle, which is written altogether in this form, she gives a lengthy explanation, in which she points out its various "voices" and other characteristics. She begins with the following comment on the general nature of her discovery:

"Polyphonic prose" is the freest, the most elastic, of all forms, for it follows at will any, and all, of the rules which guide other forms. Metrical verse has one set of laws, cadenced verse another; "polyphonic prose" can go from one to the other in the same poem with no sense of incongruity. Its only touchstone is the taste and feeling of its author.

Yet, like all other artistic forms, it has certain fundamental principles, and the chief of these is an insistence on the absolute adequacy of the manner of a passage to the thought it embodies. Taste is therefore its determining factor; taste and a rhythmic ear.³⁶

Next she takes up each of the various voices of polyphonic prose, the first of which is rhythm. She says that of all the many changes necessary in adapting Paul Fort's idea for use in English, the greatest was a matter of rhythm, because she had considerable trouble in finding a basic one from which to depart. Iambic pentameter, which is the main

³⁵ "Miss Lowell's Discovery: Polyphonic Prose," Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, VI (April, 1915), 33-34.

³⁶ Can Grande's Castle, pp. x-xi.

foundation of English meter, is so marked that it was difficult to go back and forth from it to prose or free verse. She makes the following comments on her search and final choice:

Putting aside one rhythm of English prosody after another, I finally decided to base my form upon the long, flowing cadence of oratorical prose. The variations permitted this cadence enable the poet to change the more readily into those of vers libre, or even to take the regular beat of metre, should such a marked time seem advisable. It is, of course, important that such changes should appear as not only adequate but necessary when the poem is read aloud.³⁷

Rhyme, another voice or characteristic, is used, according to Miss Lowell, to heighten the musical feeling and to give a richness of effect to a passage. Most of the time, however, this rhyme is not regular; in fact, the rhymes should seldom come at the end of cadences unless special emphasis is desired. Miss Lowell speaks of this unconventional use of rhyme as another difficulty for readers:

Seeing rhymes, their minds have been compelled by their seeming strangeness to pull them, Jack-Horner-like, out of the text and unduly notice them, to the detriment of the passage in which they are embedded. Hearing them read without stress, they pass unobserved, merely adding their quota of tonal colour to the whole.³⁸

Still another voice of polyphonic prose is return, which is perhaps the one most peculiar to this new form.

37

Ibid., pp. xii-xiii.

38

Ibid., p. xiv.

It effectively serves to hold together the various sections of a poem. "Return in 'polyphonic prose,'" says Amy Lowell, "is usually achieved by the recurrence of a dominant thought or image, coming in irregularly and in varying words, but still giving the spherical effect which I have frequently spoken of as imperative in all poetry."³⁹

Assonance and alliteration, the last two voices, will only be mentioned, for their use in polyphonic prose is similar, if not identical, to that in conventional verse forms.

Amy Lowell, in concluding her preface to Can Grande's Castle, speaks of polyphonic prose as being, in a sense, an orchestral form: "Its tone is not merely single and melodic as in that of vers libre, for instance, but contrapuntal and various."⁴⁰

The unrelated method, to be considered now, allows for greater freedom in the selection of ideas or subject matter in both polyphonic prose and free verse. Miss Lowell makes the following comment on this innovation:

It will be found in "Spring Day," and more fully enlarged upon in the series, "Towns in Colour." In these poems, I have endeavoured to give the colour, and light, and shade, of certain places and hours, stressing the purely pictorial effect, and with little or no reference to any other aspect of

³⁹ Ibid., pp. xiv-xv.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. xv.

the places described. It is an enchanting thing to wander through a city looking for its unrelated beauty, the beauty by which it captivates the sensuous sense of seeing.

I have always loved aquariums, but for years I went to them and looked, and looked, at those swirling, shooting, looping patters of fish, which always defied transcription to paper until I hit upon the "unrelated" method. The result is in "An Aquarium."⁴¹

Miss Lowell used polyphonic prose in six of her ten volumes of poetry. Sword Blades and Poppy Seed, the first volume in which this form appears, contains three relatively short pieces, "The Basket," "In a Castle," and "The Forsaken" which are interesting first samples of polyphonic prose. Eight selections in this form are found in Men, Women and Ghosts, and of these eight the following are outstanding: "The Cross-Roads," "Red Slippers," and "The Bombardment," which will be analyzed later in the chapter. There is one poem in this form in Pictures of a Floating World, three in Legends, and two in What's O'clock; but in Miss Lowell's last two volumes no polyphonic prose is found. Can Grande's Castle, however, is written completely in this form.

Can Grande's Castle, an unusually original book, is Amy Lowell's most ambitious experiment with polyphonic prose. The volume contains four long and highly descriptive pieces, semi-narrative and semi-declamatory: "Sea-Blue and Blood-Red,"

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Men, Women and Ghosts, pp. x-xi.

"Guns as Keys: and the Great Gate Swings," "Hedge Island," and "The Bronze Horses." In the preface she says that these selections owe their existence to World War I, even though they are scarcely war poems.

"Sea-Blue and Blood-Red," the first one, is the story of the love of Lady Hamilton and Lord Nelson. The tale begins with the Battle of the Nile and their first meeting and ends with their deaths. Throughout the entire poem run vivid reds and blues, the red symbolizing Lady Hamilton and the blue, Lord Nelson. The repeated use of these colors serves as a return, at the same time giving the piece a brilliant enameled effect.

The next selection, "Guns as Keys: and the Great Gate Swings," deals with Commodore Perry's visit to Japan in 1853-54, which was the first momentous meeting of the Orient and Occident in modern times. Its theme is commercialism against art. In the first of two parts there is an interesting combination of lyric free verse and polyphonic prose passages. Return, one of the essential devices of polyphonic prose, is achieved by the repetition of the idea of the great gates of Japan, and, especially, by the ominous presence of the United States ships with their bristling guns.

"Hedge Island" is the third and shortest of the poems. It tells of an England of hedges and stage coaches in the Napoleonic days. The idea of hedgerows, running out in all

directions from London, holds the piece together; and the stage coaches roll between these hedges in a series of scenes.

The last selection is "The Bronze Horses," in which are presented four civilizations and four wars; but the horses, representing art, always survive unhurt. These horses, which move in an endless cycle, are used as the return. This idea serves to hold together a selection which otherwise would be very disconnected.

In Can Grande's Castle one finds a brilliant display of colors and pageantry and a great deal of movement. There is, however, an excessive descriptive quality. The following passage from Van Wyck Brooks effectively indicates the exuberant spirit and the varied combinations of Amy Lowell's polyphonic prose in this book:

It was charged with enough electricity to burn one's hand off. . . One had to touch the wires with circumspection. But there Amy Lowell exulted in her strength; and her feeling for ships and battles, for barbarism and heroism, for pageantry, pomp, dash and fanfaronade, for the theatre of history and the clash of peoples boiled up and bubbled over with a splendid brio. She was Lady Hamilton, she was Nelson, she was Commodore Perry in Japan, with his sailor-chanties; and no New England historian since the great days of Prescott and Motley had given the world such brilliant historical scenes.⁴²

In the criticism of Winfield T. Scott, one finds an evaluation much less favorable than that of Brooks. Scott

⁴² "Amy Lowell," The New Republic, CIII (August 5, 1940), 185.

says that the selections in Can Grande's Castle are only remarkable tours de force like most of Miss Lowell's work:

They have vigor and verve and great sounding splashes of variation, but they can not possibly last except as the phenomena of a genuinely noble experiment certain to fail. In allying all forms, they become formless. In relying completely upon the taste of the author, they seem to have no touchstone. And finally instead of emerging as a free and supple expression, they strain and posture in complete artificiality. They do much and say little.⁴³

Conrad Aiken, even though he severely criticizes the artistic incompleteness of the book, readily recognizes the good qualities of the experiment. He says

. . .that even what is relatively a failure for Miss Lowell is none the less brilliant, and would suffice to make the reputation of a lesser poet. "Can Grande's Castle" is a remarkable book, a book which every one interested in the direction of contemporary poetry should read, whether for its own sake or for its value as the test of a new form of art.⁴⁴

Actual selections of polyphonic prose will now be analyzed in some detail in order to show the real nature of this form. The prose typography, of course, is obvious. The main voices to be considered are irregular rhyme and return or refrain. Brief illustrations of assonance and alliteration will be given. Also the employment of the unrelated method will be considered.

First, "The Bombardment" will be examined in its

⁴³ "Amy Lowell after Ten Years," New England Quarterly, VIII (September, 1935), 327.

⁴⁴ Scepticisms, p. 125.

entirety. The rhyming words are underscored with solid lines; the various returns are indicated with dotted lines.

As can be seen, the main return is the "boom" of the bombardment. The use of the rain and water, the cathedral and steeple, and the "fire" and "flame" also serve as return. Likewise return is achieved by mentioning various persons a second time. Four persons, or types, are presented individually in separate little scenes, in which they react to the bombardment of the city. Then near the end of the selection each of these persons is introduced again. All these various repetitions give unity to the poem.

The first paragraph of "The Bombardment" has been analyzed for assonance and alliteration. The following are the main words showing assonance: (o) slowly--without--force--drops--into--stops--moment--on--John--on--over--stone--cloak--from--conduit--on--stones--does--about--sound--only--from--spout; (a) rain--carved--saint--again--splashed--gargoyle--falls--cathedral--saquare--against--rain--again--after--water--gargoyle.

Looking for alliteration, one finds that the "s" sound is the one most frequently repeated in this paragraph: Slowly--stops--Saint--slides--slipping--stone--splashes--stones--square--steeple--sweep--sky--sound--swings--spout--silence.

"The Bombardment" is given below:

Slowly, without force, the rain drops into the city. It stops a moment on the carved head of Saint John, then slides on again, slipping and trickling over his stone cloak. It splashes from the lead conduit of a gargoyle, and falls from it in turmoil on the stones in the Cathedral square. Where are the people, and why does the fretted steeple sweep about in the sky? Boom! The sound swings against the rain. Boom again! After it, only water rushing in the gutters, and the turmoil from the spout of the gargoyle. Silence. Ripples and mutters. Boom!

The room is damp, but warm. Little flashes swarm about from the firelight. The lustres of the chandelier are bright, and clusters of rubies leap in the bohemian glasses on the étagère. Her hands are restless, but the white masses of her hair are quite still. Boom! Will it never cease to torture, this iteration! Boom! The vibration shatters a glass on the étagère. It lies there, formless and glowing, with all its crimson gleams shot out of pattern, spilled, flowing red, blood-red. A thin bell-note pricks through the silence. A door creaks. The old lady speaks: "Victor, clear away that broken glass." "Alas! Madame, the bohemian glass!" "Yes, Victor, one hundred years ago my father brought it--" Boom! The room shakes, the servitor quakes. Another goblet shivers and breaks. Boom!

It rustles at the window-pane, the smooth, streaming rain, and he is shut within its clash and murmur. Inside is his candle, his table, his ink, his pen, and his dreams. He is thinking, and the walls are pierced with beams of sunshine, slipping through young green. A fountain tosses itself up at the blue sky, and through the spattered water in the basin he can see copper carp, lazily floating among cold leaves. A wind harp in a cedar-tree grieves and whispers, and words blow into his brain, bubbled, iridescent, shooting up like flowers of fire, higher and higher. Boom! The flame-flowers snap on their slender stems. The fountain rears up in long broken spears of dishevelled water and flattens into the earth. Boom! And there is only the room, the table, the candle, and the sliding rain. Again, Boom!-- Boom!-- Boom! He stuffs his fingers into his ears.

He sees corpses, and cries out in fright. Boom!
It is night, and they are shelling the city. Boom!
Boom!

A child wakes and is afraid, and weeps in the darkness. What has made the bed shake? "Mother, where are you? I am awake." "Hush, my Darling, I am here." "But, Mother, something so queer happened, the room shook." Boom! "Oh! What is it? What is the matter?" Boom! "Where is Father? I am so afraid." Boom! The child sobs and shrieks. The house trembles and creaks. Boom!

Retorts, globes, tubes, and phials lie shattered. All his trials oozing across the floor. The life that was his choosing, lonely, urgent, goaded by a hope, all gone. A weary man in a ruined laboratory, that is his story. Boom! Gloom and ignorance, and the jig of drunken brutes. Diseases like snakes crawling over the earth, leaving trails of slime. Wails from people burying their dead. Through the window, he can see the rocking steeple. A ball of fire falls on the lead of the roof, and the sky tears apart on a spike of flame. Up the spire, behind the lacings of stone, zigzagging in and out of the carved tracings, squirms the fire. It spouts like yellow wheat from the gargoyles, coils round the head of Saint John, and aureoles him in light. It leaps into the night and hisses against the rain. The Cathedral is a burning stain on the white, wet night.

Boom! The Cathedral is a torch, and the houses next to it begin to scorch. Boom! The bohemian glass on the étagère is no longer there. Boom! A stalk of flame sways against the red damask curtains. The old lady cannot walk. She watches the creeping stalk and counts. Boom!-- Boom!--Boom!

The poet rushes into the street, and the rain wraps him in a sheet of silver. But it is threaded with gold and powdered with scarlet beads. The city burns. Quivering, spearing, thrusting, lapping, streaming, run the flames. Over roofs, and walls, and shops, and stalls. Smearing its gold on the sky, the fire dances, lances itself through the doors, and lisps and chuckles along the floors.

The child wakes again and screams at the yellow petalled flower flickering at the window. The

little red lips of flame creep along the ceiling beams.

The old man sits among his broken experiments and looks at the burning Cathedral. Now the streets are swarming with people. They seek shelter and crowd into the cellars. They shout and call, and over all, slowly and without force, the rain drops into the city. Boom! And the steeple crashes down among the people. Boom! Boom, again! The water rushes along the gutters. The fire roars and mutters. Boom!⁴⁵

The second piece of polyphonic prose to be considered is "Red Slippers," one of the five selections in "Towns in Colour." "Red Slippers" is presented as a good example of the use of the unrelated method, which is employed frequently in both polyphonic prose and free verse. In this poem, as Miss Lowell says, the purely pictorial effect is stressed, with little reference to any other aspect of the scene presented. There is a great play of color and light. Also the use of return, another of the main devices of polyphonic prose, is apparent in this piece. The first two and the last two lines express the same idea of red slippers in a shop-window and gray sleet outside, and the word red is repeated frequently. "Red Slippers" is given below:

Red slippers in a shop-window, and outside in
the street, flaws of grey, windy sleet!

Behind the polished glass, the slippers hang
in long threads of red, festooning from the ceiling

like stalactites of blood, flooding the eyes of passers-by with dripping colour, jamming their crimson reflections against the windows of cabs and tram-cars, screaming their claret and salmon into the teeth of the sleet, plopping their little round maroon lights upon the tops of umbrellas.

The row of white, sparkling shop fronts is gashed and bleeding, it bleeds red slippers. They spout under the electric light, fluid and fluctuating, a hot rain--and freeze again to red slippers, myriadly multiplied in the mirror side of the window.

They balance upon arched insteps like springing bridges of crimson lacquer; they swing up over curved heels like whirling tanagers sucked in a wind-pocket; they flatten out, heelless, like July ponds, flared and burnished by red rockets.

Snap, snap, they are cracker-sparks of scarlet in the white, monotonous block of shops.

They plunge the clangour of billions of vermillion trumpets into the crowd outside, and echo in faint rose over the pavement.

People hurry by, for these are only shoes, and in a window, farther down, is a big lotus bud of cardboard whose petals open every few minutes and reveal a wax doll, with staring bead eyes and flaxen hair, lolting awkwardly in its flower chair.

One has often seen shoes, but whoever saw a cardboard lotus bud before?

The flaws of grey, windy sleet beat on the shop-window where there are only red slippers.⁴⁶

The last selection to be considered is "Sea-Blue and Blood-Red," mentioned earlier in the chapter as one of the pieces in Can Grande's Castle. Especially interesting in this poem is the return, which makes the piece an artistic entity. In fact, return, more than any other device, helps give polyphonic prose unity and form. The dominant effect

in this poem is the abundant use of blues and reds, which flare in a great profusion of color and movement. Either the words "blue" and "red" or ideas that will suggest these colors are repeated as a return. The blue symbolizes Lord Nelson, and the red, Lady Hamilton.

Part I, "The Mediterranean," and the first portion of Part II, "Naples," are given below. In these introductory sections the blue of the Mediterranean represents Lord Nelson, and the red eye of Vesuvius represents Lady Hamilton.

The last few lines of the selection from "Naples" (beginning "Ah, che bella cosa") are almost metrically perfect. This exemplifies the combined use of both meter and prose rhythms in the same poem.

The selections from "Sea-Blue and Blood-Red" follow:

I

The Mediterranean

Blue as the tip of a salvia blossom, the inverted cup of the sky arches over the sea. Up to meet it, in a flat band of glaring colour, rises the water. The sky is unspiced by clouds, but the sea is flecked with pink and white light shadows, and silver scintillations snip-snap over the tops of the waves.

Something moves along the horizon. A puff of wind blowing up the edges of the silver-blue sky? Clouds! Clouds! Great thunderheads marching along the skyline! No, by Jove! The sun shining on sails! Vessels, hull down, with only their tiers of canvas showing. Beautiful ballooning thunderheads dipping one after another below the blue band of the sea.

II

Naples

Red tiles, yellow stucco, layer on layer of windows, roofs, and balconies, Naples pushes up the hill away from the curving bay. A red, half-closed eye, Vesuvius watches and waits. All Naples prates of this and that, and runs about its little business, shouting, bawling, incessantly calling its wares. Fish frying, macaroni drying, seven feet piles of red and white broccoli, grapes heaped high with rosemary, sliced pomegranates dripping seeds, plucked and bleeding chickens, figs on spits, lemons in baskets, melons cut and quartered nicely, "Ah, che bella cosa!" They even sell water, clear crystal water for a paul or two. And everything done to a hullabaloo. They jabber over cheese, they chatter over wine, they babble at the corners in the bright sunshine. And piercing through the noise is the beggar-whine, always, like an undertone, the beggar-whine; and always the crimson, watching eye of Vesuvius.⁴⁷

Critics are generally divided about the significance of polyphonic prose as a poetic form. According to Percy H. Boynton, Miss Lowell's polyphonic prose is immensely self-conscious and overly decorative:

The reader of polyphonic prose is assaulted by decorative effects as brutally as a patron is in the lobby of a metropolitan hotel, where the adornment is so lavish and obtrusive that it eclipses the main design. Polyphonism as a distinct form of writing has made less of a ripple than Imagism; both are already lisping into silence on the shores of oblivion.⁴⁸

Likewise Conrad Aiken has adverse criticism for her use

⁴⁷ Can Grande's Castle, pp. 3-5.

⁴⁸ Some Contemporary Americans, pp. 81-82.

of this form. He says that perhaps she has overestimated its possibilities:

It is precisely at those points where polyphonic prose is more self-conscious or artificial than ordinary prose--where it introduces an excess of rhyme, assonance, and alliteration--that it is most markedly inferior to it. Theory to the contrary, these shifts from prose to winged prose or verse are often so abrupt as to be incongruous and disturbing. . .Miss Lowell's polyphonic prose is a perpetual furor of disturbance, both of thought and of style. Again, refrain should be sparingly used, adroitly varied and concealed. . .⁴⁹

Louis Untermeyer, however, says, "If Miss Lowell has done nothing else, she has enriched English as well as American literature with a new and variable medium of expression."⁵⁰ In his criticism of Can Grande's Castle, Untermeyer makes these comments about her development in the use of polyphonic prose:

A glance at her poems in this manner shows not only how far she has gone from the original innovation of Paul Fort. . .but how greatly she has progressed beyond her own previous efforts in this mode. With its many changes of rhythm and subtleties of rhyme, it is practically a new form; dignified, orchestral, fluid. It is a form of almost infinite possibilities. . .⁵¹

Finally, Alfred Kreymborg's opinion of Miss Lowell's polyphonic prose will be given:

⁴⁹ Scepticisms, p. 123.

⁵⁰ American Poetry Since 1900, p. 149.

⁵¹ Ibid., 149.

It is strange that her venture into polyphonic prose--an adventure joined by Fletcher--has had little effect on our subsequent poetry. Theoretically, it is a remarkably plastic form. . . . Possibly Louis Untermeyer has struck at the prime fault of her polyphonic prose, or of most of her verse: "Motion frequently takes the place of emotion."⁵²

In this chapter free verse and polyphonic prose, two outstanding elements of Amy Lowell's poetic technique, have been discussed; symbolism, imagism, and "colorism" three other important devices, will be taken up in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

SYMBOLISM, IMAGISM, AND "COLORISM"

Symbolism, imagism, and "colorism," which--next to free verse and polyphonic prose--stand out as main devices in Amy Lowell's poetic technique, will be discussed briefly in this chapter.

The first device to be considered is symbolism. Perhaps it would be well to begin with a definition of the term and then present a few comments on Miss Lowell's use of symbolism. The main part of this section, however, will be devoted to a consideration of the various symbolistic poems in each of her volumes of poetry and to a discussion of her moon symbolism, which runs all through her writing.

Symbolism is defined by Edmund Wilson as "an attempt by carefully studied means--a complicated association of ideas represented by a medley of metaphors--to communicate unique personal feelings."¹ He makes the following remarks about the Symbolist movement, which was the immediate forerunner of Imagism and which carried over into the second school in many ways:

It was the tendency of Symbolism--that second swing of the pendulum away from a mechanistic view of

¹
Axel's Castle, p. 21.

nature and from a social conception of man--to make poetry even more a matter of the sensations and emotions of the individual than had been the case with Romanticism: Symbolism, indeed, sometimes had the result of making poetry so much a private concern of the poet's that it turned out to be incommunicable to the reader.²

Its symbols, according to Wilson, differ from such conventional ones as the Christian Cross and are often illogical and indefinite. He says that "the symbols of the Symbolist school are usually chosen arbitrarily by the poet to stand for special ideas of his own--they are a sort of disguise for these ideas."³ Thus one of the primary aims of Symbolism is to suggest things rather than state them plainly.

Other than that contained in Damon's Amy Lowell, there is very little criticism on her symbolism. Damon makes the following comments concerning this situation:

As the critics generally have avoided the word 'symbol' in discussing Amy Lowell's work, I must intrude my own testimony that I often discussed her symbolism with her. She spoke casually of it as obvious and natural, endorsed certain interpretations, but was evasive when I could not phrase her meaning exactly and asked her to do so.⁴

According to Damon, Miss Lowell's "theory of symbolism was

²
Ibid., pp. 19-20.

³
Ibid., p. 30.

⁴
Amy Lowell: A Chronicle, p. 256.

wholly her own."⁵

Winfield T. Scott, in one of the few other criticisms to be found, points out that her frequent use of symbolism has a varying success:

With it, she occasionally secured a fine macabre effect--as in "Time's Acre" and "Four Sides of a House"; but altogether her symbolism has neither the simple profundity of Yeats' poems nor the involved profundity of Blake at his best; it increases the turgid making of pictures.⁶

Considering Amy Lowell's own ideas on symbolism, one finds that she speaks of the universe, including man and nature, as a huge symbol:

The modern poets are less concerned with dogma and more with truth. They see in the universe a huge symbol, and so absolute has this symbol become to them that they have no need to dwell constantly upon its symbolic meaning. For this reason, the symbol has taken on a new intensity, and is given much prominence. What appear to be pure nature poems are of course so, but in a different way from most nature poems of the older writers; for nature is not now something separate from man, man and nature are recognized as a part of a whole, man being a part of nature, and all falling into a place in a vast plan, the key to which is natural science.⁷

Let us turn now to the consideration of the various symbolistic pieces in Miss Lowell's volumes of poetry. Examining A Dome of Many Coloured Glass, her first book, one

⁵
Ibid., p. 726.

⁶
"Amy Lowell after Ten Years," New England Quarterly, VIII (September, 1935), 329.

⁷
Tendencies in Modern American Poetry, p. vii.

discovers that the title, taken from a well-known line in Shelley's "Adonais," symbolizes life itself. In "Before the Altar" is found the beginning of the moon symbolism which runs through much of her writing. This poem, the last to be written for the volume, is the only selection that has anything in common with her later work.

Sword Blades and Poppy Seed is introduced by a symbolic tale of the same title. In this poem "Ephraim Bard, Dealer in Words," interprets the meaning of "Sword Blades" and "Poppy Seed" and at the same time the meaning of the book and the functions of literature when he says: "All books are either dreams or swords, you can cut, or you can drug, with words."⁸ The poet, paying the price of his own existence, buys his swords and poppy seed from this old man. "This is symbolic narrative, of course," says Damon, "a form which Miss Lowell used many times, in this book and later."⁹

The most interesting symbolic poem in this volume, however, is "The Book of Hours of Sister Clothilde." A young nun who is illuminating the book chooses the bright green of an adder's skin as the only one heavenly enough for the Virgin's robe. According to Damon this poem has a meaning which Miss Lowell cherished too much to reveal, and he says

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Sword Blades and Poppy Seed, p. 18.

⁹

Op. cit., p. 255.

that she "turned off attempts at explanation with a laugh, but she admitted that the use of a poisonous snake for the Virgin's robe was intentional, and the key to the whole meaning."¹⁰ Other symbolic pieces in Sword Blades and Poppy Seed are "The Basket," "Clear, with Light, Variable Winds," "The Shadow," and "The Great Adventure of Max Breuck."

In Men, Women and Ghosts the use of symbolism is not so apparent as in some of Miss Lowell's volumes. A few of the poems, however, do rely largely on this device. In "The Red Lacquer Music Stand" one finds symbolized the ill effect of religion upon childhood pleasures. "The Allies" depicts war as a "long snail-slow serpent of marching men" determined to destroy the red eagle of militarism, and war is symbolized in "Lead Soldiers" through a nursery scene.

Turning to Can Grande's Castle, one discovers a considerable amount of symbolism, especially in "Sea-Blue and Blood-Red." Throughout this long poem Lord Nelson is represented by blue and Lady Hamilton by red. Damon makes this comment on the use of these colors:

Realism merges into symbolism, then re-emerges; for Nelson himself is the blue of the sea, Emma the blood-red Vesuvian flame. They are two threads, red and blue, whose interweaving and unravelling is the leitmotif marking the beginning and end of episodes, and binding the whole poem together.¹¹

¹⁰

Ibid., p. 256.

¹¹

Ibid., p. 473.

In "The Bronze Horses" the horses stand for the permanence of art, and the Great Gate of Japan is symbolic in "Guns as Keys: and the Great Gate Swings."

Pictures of the Floating World, the fifth volume of poetry, contains many symbolistic poems. Especially is this true of the last and main section, "Planes of Personality." But in this short summary only a few of the more obvious examples can be mentioned. "Haunted," "Preparation," "The Traveling Bear," and "The Peddler of Flowers" are part of the poems that employ symbolism to some extent. "Gargoyles" and "Chopin," both "experiments in applying the 'unrelated' method to ideas rather than images,"¹² are, according to Damon, unusual types of symbolic impressionism. The following, however, are especially interesting as purely symbolic pieces: "On the Mantelpiece," "Misericordia," and "Dreams in War Time."

In Legends seven of the eleven selections are symbolistic tales or legends. They are "Memorandum Confided by a Yucca to a Passion-Vine," "A Legend of Porcelain," "Many Swans," "Witch-Woman," "The Ring and the Castle," "Gavotte in D Minor," and "The Statue in the Garden." "Memorandum Confided by a Yucca to a Passion-Vine" will be discussed in connection with Amy Lowell's moon symbolism, and only "Many

¹²

Ibid., p. 509.

"Swans" will be considered here. It is the tale of an Indian man who finally acquires the sun, which has long been the goal of his life. To his disappointment, however, he finds that his sun burns all the villages and fields in its path, and in the end everything is taken from him. Miss Lowell says that her fundamental intention in "Many Swans" was

. . .a double allegory, the sun myth being one, and the other being the destruction of the Indian races through the all-imposing power and intelligence of the white man. Many Swans typifying both the Indian arrogance and the racial greed and omnipotence of the whites.¹³

What's O'clock, Amy Lowell's first posthumous volume, contains numerous symbolic pieces, some of which rank among her better poems. The book opens with "East, West, North, and South of a Man," which is actually a self-portrait of Miss Lowell as knight, story-teller, peddler, and book-worm, with each person presented in a separate section. "Which, Being Interpreted, Is as May Be, or Otherwise" and "The Green Parrakeet" are two symbolic narratives. The first of these poems is the story of a man who lives high above the world because he despises it, but finally he is destroyed by the beauty which he discovers. The parrakeet in the second piece symbolizes prejudice. The following are among the shorter symbolistic poems: "The Swans," "Once Jericho,"

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From a letter to Padraic Colum as quoted in Damon, op. cit., p. 561.

"Footing up a Total," "White Currants," "Fool o' the Moon," and "La Ronde du Diable."

East Wind, made up of thirteen tales of decadent New England, contains little or no symbolism. The same is true with Ballads for Sale, the last of Miss Lowell's books. In this second volume, however, there are a few symbolic tales, one of which is "Apotheosis." According to Damon this poem is "a Blakish vision of the curse on love."¹⁴ "Songs of the Pueblo Indians," the last selection in Ballads for Sale, also contains some symbolism.

Miss Lowell's moon symbolism, which is perhaps used more than any other one type, will now be discussed in some detail. The first poem in which it appears is "Before the Altar," included in A Dome of Many Coloured Glass. Damon points out that in this piece is found the basic symbol of Keats' "Endymion" and gives the following summary of "Before the Altar":

This altar is pagan; the deity is the moon. A man stands worshipping; he has nothing to offer, except his life, his heart, to a moon which gives no sign of answer. No Indian Maid offers a perplexed comfort, no choruses celebrate a coming marriage in the skies; there is nothing but a despairing, unassuageable desire.¹⁵

One of the most interesting and unusual examples of

¹⁴ Op. cit., p. 715.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 138.

Miss Lowell's moon symbolism will be found, however, in the Peruvian legend, "Memorandum Confided by a Yucca to a Passion-Vine." Damon explains this piece and its symbolism in the following passage:

It is another poem of that moon-worship which had been the theme of the first poem in her first book. There is a close kinship between Mr. Keats on Box Hill watching the 'naked waist' of her he had put into his second canto, and the love-starved fox under the thorny cactus watching the same 'virgin waist.' The symbolism of the poem is sufficiently indicated in the title, for the yucca is the lily of the desert, while the passion-vine names itself. This vine drapes the gates of the sacred city of Cusco, into which the little fox creeps, to assault the virgin moon, who has been drawn down to the earth. The Inca texture of the poem is a triumph, from the opening torrid sunrise and the chattering animals, to that extraordinary reascent of the defiled moon at the end; and of course Amy Lowell would never miss the gold temple of the Sun, the silver temple of the Moon, and the garden of precious metals.¹⁶

The fox's assault of the moon and her reascent into the sky are given in these lines:

Satyr fox assaulting the moon!
 THUNDER!!!
 Lightning serpents
 Wound in great circles above the Temple.
 Sheets of lightning snarling from racing,
 purple clouds
 And rain roaring down the hot walls
 of a copper sky.

The clouds splinter, and a ruined moon wavers up
 into the heavens, above her are three great
 rings, one of blood, one of black, and the
 utmost all of stinging, glutinous, intorting
 coils of smoke.

Upon the disk of the moon are spots, black obscene
spots, the print of a fox's paws.¹⁷

"Witch-Woman," also in Legends, is another poem in which the moon is involved. This is the story of a man in love with an evil woman. He desires her beautiful flesh; but one night when he is spying on her worshipping the moon, he discovers that her real being, death, goes up into the heavens, enters the moon, and corrupts it. The following lines depict the witch's ascent into the heavens after she has changed into a skeleton and her wild dance on earth is finished:

Scarlet is the ladder dropping from the moon. Liquid
is the ladder--like water moving yet keeping its
shape.

The skeleton mounts like a great grey ape, and its
bones rattle; the rattle of the bones is the
crack of dead trees bitten by frost. The wind
is desolate and the sea moans.

But the ruby chair of Mother Moon shudders, and
quickness with a hard fire. The skeleton has
reached the last rung. It melts and is ab-
sorbed in the burning moon. The moon? No
moon, but a crimson rose afloat in the sky.
A rose? No rose, but a black-tongued lily.
A lily? No lily, but a purple orchid with
dark, writhing bars.¹⁸

Of the poems based on moon symbolism, the last one to be discussed is "Fool o' the Moon," found in What's O'clock. Damon says that this piece "represents the psychology of the

¹⁷
Legends, p. 32.

¹⁸
Ibid., pp. 161-162.

genius--one might call it the triumph of Endymion."¹⁹ The first six lines are given below:

The silver-slippered moon treads the blue tiles
 of the sky,
 And I
 See her dressed in golden roses,
 With a single breast uncovered,
 The carnation tip of it
 Urgent for a lover's lip.²⁰

And the poem ends with these lines:

Shall I tell what befell
 Once behind that bush,
 When the rattling pods at noon
 Made a music in September.
 Shall I say what I remember--
 While the long, sea-grasses croon,
 And the sea-spray on the sand
 Chips the silence from the land?
 Hush, then let me say it soon.
 I have lain with Mistress Moon.²¹

The four poems discussed above are the main ones based on moon symbolism. There are numerous other selections, however, that deal with the moon, but not in a purely symbolic sense.

Another device in Amy Lowell's poetic technique is imagism. Not all of her poetry, by any means, is purely imagistic; but much of it is, and several examples of her images will be included in the last part of this section. Before these illustrations are given, however, imagism will be

¹⁹
Op. cit., p. 705.

²⁰
What's O'clock, p. 154.

²¹
Ibid., p. 153.

defined, the Imagist credo will be mentioned again, and a few criticisms of Miss Lowell's imagistic writing will be presented.

According to her, imagism does not mean merely the presentation of pictures. She says: "'Imagism' refers to the manner of presentation, not to the subject. It means clear presentation of whatever the author wishes to convey."²² Since the Imagist credo has been presented in detail in the second chapter of this paper, it will only be mentioned here. It should be pointed out, however, that Miss Lowell frequently violated certain rules of this credo; she refused to be confined to any set pattern.

A few criticisms of her imagistic writing will now be given, the first of which are opinions to the effect that she often violated the rules set up by the Imagist school. Winfield T. Scott speaks of her lack of concentration:

Contrary to the dicta of the imagists, the work of Amy Lowell was too often not concentrated when it should have been. She could not (as Keats advised Shelley) load every rift with ore. She painted the rifts with a dazzling play of word-pictures. Such paint does not last.²³

Louis Untermeyer presents a similar opinion, concerning form, however, rather than concentration:

²²

Some Imagist Poets, 1916, p. v.

²³

Op. cit., p. 327.

It was the form, rather than the imagination itself, which worried the critics. Amy herself continually violated the Imagist manifesto and extended her work far beyond its tenets; but she too confused the form with the substance. It was not until much later that she was able to separate the true "inwardness" of the poem from the outer technique.²⁴

The following favorable comment on her power of description is made by Horace Gregory and Mary Zaturenska:

Amy Lowell's imagination was vivid, often exact and always clear, and she could describe a flower, the effect of beech and pine trees as they appeared to her sight through a heavy sunlight or an object of art with memorable vividness.²⁵

And according to Archibald MacLeish, Miss Lowell, especially in Pictures of the Floating World, does more than make images as most of the Imagists do. He says: "Her power to transfer objects into words is merely a function of her power as a poet. . . She never permits her verse the gesture of the exclamatory forefinger, indicating nothing."²⁶

Both Harriet Monroe and Louis Untermeyer are also of the opinion that Miss Lowell's best images are to be found in Pictures of the Floating World. According to Miss Monroe the brief poems like some of the "Laquer Prints" contain the

²⁴ "Storm Center in Brookline," Harper's Magazine, CLXXIX (August, 1939), 270.

²⁵ A History of American Poetry, p. 190.

²⁶ "Amy Lowell and the Art of Poetry," The North American Review, CCXXI (March, 1925), 520.

best examples of her imagery.²⁷ Untermeyer praises the images in the sections, "Two Speak Together" and "Eyes, Ears, and Walking," and says that Miss Lowell is at her best in them.²⁸

In concluding this summary of the criticism of Amy Lowell's imagism, the following passage from Poets and Their Art is offered as a majority opinion. Miss Monroe says that much of Miss Lowell's writing is imagistic; then she adds

But imagism could not hold her in, nor any other system of technique. She has used for her own purposes the training it gave her, just as she has used her study of prosody, and her wide reading of poetry in English and French, and, through translations, in other languages. No doubt it has sharpened her style, made it more direct and firm, even in the long narratives in Legends, and the picture-stories, if one may so call them, in Can Grande's Castle.²⁹

Even though all of Amy Lowell's writing is not imagistic, much of her best work is. It is not the purpose of this paper to make an exhaustive study; consequently a few outstanding examples will serve to illustrate Miss Lowell's imagism.

The first few lines of "A London Thoroughfare. 2 A.M." is a good example of her early imagery:

They have watered the street,
It shines in the glare of lamps,
Cold, white lamps,

²⁷ Poets and Their Art, p. 81.

²⁸ American Poetry Since 1900, p. 152.

²⁹ Op. cit., p. 82.

And lies
 Like a slow-moving river,
 Barred with silver and black.
 Cabs go down it,
 One,
 And then another.³⁰

Next a passage of imagistic writing from the polyphonic prose poem, "The Basket," will be given:

The inkstand is full of ink, and the paper lies white and unspotted, in the round of light thrown by a candle. Puffs of darkness sweep into the corners, and keep rolling through the room behind his chair. The air is silver and pearl, for the night is liquid with moonlight.

See how the roof glitters, like ice!
 Over there, a slice of yellow cuts into the silver-blue, and beside it stand two geraniums, purple because the light is silver-blue, to-night.³¹

The following lines are taken from the description of the Temple of the Moon in "Memorandum Confided by a Yucca to a Passion-Vine":

Stately dates sweep a merry-go-round,
 The fountains spring in a sparkle of sound.
 The moonlight falls in a heap on the ground.
 And there is Light!
 Light in a crowned effulgence
 Thrown up from the flowers and trees,
 Delicate, pearled light, barred by beautiful shadows,
 Bloomed light, plunging upon the silver-roofed Temple.
 Open, Open,
 Door of the Temple of the Moon.³²

An unusual image, perhaps a bit fantastic, is found in

³⁰ Sword Blades and Poppy Seed, p. 43.

³¹ Ibid., p. 164.

³² Legends, p. 28.

the short poem, "Portrait of an Orchestra Leader":

A young man on a platform?
 A white flame upreared in a silver dish,
 Swaying to the wind of horns and oboes,
 Bending to the undulate waves of violins.
 Do you think you see a young man in a swallow-
 tailed coat leading an orchestra?
 I tell you it is a white, pointed flame in a
 silver dish.³³

A considerable amount of imagistic poetry is found in What's O'clock. "Lilacs" and "Purple Grackles," two of the best-known pieces in the book, contain numerous beautiful images. Some of the most delicate and imaginative ones, however, will be found in "Night Clouds":

The white mares of the moon rush along the sky
 Beating their golden hoofs upon the glass Heavens;
 The white mares of the moon are all standing on
 their hind legs
 Pawing at the green porcelain doors of the remote
 Heavens.
 Fly, Mares!
 Strain your utmost,
 Scatter the milky dust of stars,
 Or the tiger sun will leap upon you and destroy you
 With one lick of his vermilion tongue.³⁴

Also included in What's O'clock is "Twenty-Four Hokku on a Modern Theme."³⁵ Two of these twenty-four images are given here:

³³ Ballads for Sale, p. 194.

³⁴ What's O'clock, p. 222.

³⁵ What's O'clock, p. 37-43.

I

Again the larkspur,
Heavenly blue in my garden.
They, at least, unchanged.

XIX

Love is a game--yes?
I think it is a drowning:
Black willows and stars.

Miss Lowell did some experimenting with the Japanese hokku, a stanza containing three lines and a total of only seventeen syllables. This shortest of all verse forms can be used effectively for imagistic writing.

As was pointed out earlier, some of Miss Lowell's best imagery is found in Pictures of the Floating World, an especially imaginative book. The short poem "Sunshine," one of the selections in "Laquer Prints," presents a clear-cut image, though somewhat artificial:

The pool is edged with the blade-like
leaves of irises.
If I throw a stone into the placid water,
It suddenly stiffens
Into rings and rings
Of sharp gold wire.³⁶

But of all Miss Lowell's images, the following, in my opinion, are among the most beautiful ones. Parts of "Trees in Winter" are given below:

Pine-Trees:
Black clouds slowly swaying
Over a white earth.

Hemlocks:
 Coned green shadows
 Through a falling veil.

* * *

Almonds:
 Flaring needles
 Stabbing at a grey sky.

Weeping Cherries:
 Tossing smoke
 Swept down by wind.³⁷

Turning now to her "colorism" the last device of her poetic technique to be considered, one finds that various critics comment on her abundant use of brilliant colors. In criticising A Dome of Many Coloured Glass, Archibald MacLeish says that in this book there are "a few attempts to present color combinations by the naming of shades of color without edge or outline, which are interesting both because of her later brilliant successes in this regard and because success so long eluded her."³⁸ He also comments on the use of color in "The Bronze Horses," one of the selections in Can Grande's Castle:

What you have here is not a drama, nor a story, but a ballet in words. . . Phrases of color, of line, repeat and develop themselves as they would be repeated and developed by a great choreographer. Line and color are made significant, made to speak. . .³⁹

³⁷

Ibid., pp. 136-137.

³⁸

Op. cit., p. 515.

³⁹

Ibid., pp. 517-518.

Harriet Monroe offers the following comments on Amy Lowell's use of color and sound:

She delights in the rush and clatter of sounds, in the kaleidoscopic glitter of colors, even though the emotional or intellectual motive goes somewhat astray among them. In a few poems in the Imagist anthologies--Spring Day for example--one's ears and eyes feel fairly battered; still more in the Can Grande essays in polyphonic prose.⁴⁰

In criticising Pictures of a Floating World, Louis Untermeyer speaks of a burning, brilliant quality in many of the poems:

The colors with which her lines are studded are like bits of bright enamel; every leaf and flower has a lacquered brilliance. It is obvious that Miss Lowell agitates whatever she touches; under her provocative observation not even the most static thing can remain quiescent.⁴¹

Conrad Aiken also speaks of a "stylistic and colouristic brilliance"⁴² in her polyphonic prose.

In reading Amy Lowell's poetry, a person cannot help being conscious of a strong color element running through all her writing. In fact, many of her poems are fairly ablaze with many colors, of which the reader immediately is acutely conscious. Several passages illustrating her use of brilliant or unusual colors will be presented in the remainder

⁴⁰ Op. cit., p. 81.

⁴¹ American Poetry Since 1900, p. 152.

⁴² Scepticisms, p. 119.

of this chapter.

In these lines from "The Captured Goddess" Miss Lowell uses, though not as artistically as in her later poetry, many unrelated colors:

I cared not where she led me,
My eyes were full of colours:
Saffrons, rubies, the yellows of beryls,
And the indigo-blue of quartz;
Flights of rose, layers of chrysoprase,
Points of orange, spirals of vermillion,
The spotted gold of tiger-lily petals,
The loud pink of bursting hydrangeas.
I followed,
And watched for the flashing of her wings.⁴³

As the name suggests, "Towns in Colour" is literally glittering with color. The first selection, "Red Slippers," gains its effect through the use of many reds, and an interesting study in whites is found in "Thompson's Lunch Room--Grand Central Station." The first nineteen lines from the second piece are given below:

Wax-white--
Floor, ceiling, walls.
Ivory shadows
Over the pavement
Polished to cream surfaces
By constant sweeping.
The big room is coloured like the petals
Of a great magnolia,
And has a patina
Of flower bloom
Which makes it shine dimly
Under the electric lamps.

Chairs are ranged in rows
 Like sepia seeds
 Waiting fulfilment.
 The chalk-white spot of a cook's cap
 Moves unglossily against the vaguely bright wall--
 Dull chalk-white striking the retina like a blow
 Through the wavering uncertainty of steam.⁴⁴

Can Grande's Castle, as has been pointed out earlier in the chapter, is especially rich with color. To illustrate, a passage from the death scene of Lord Nelson in "Sea-Blue and Blood-Red" is given:

Red blood in a flood before his eyes. Red from horizon to zenith, crushing down like beaten metal. The Admiral falls to his knees, to his side, and lies there, and the crimson glare closes over him, a cupped inexorable end. . . .

The blue thread is snapped and the bolt falls from the loom. Weave, shuttle of the red thread. Weave over and under yourself in a scarlet ecstasy. It is all red now he comes to die. Red, with the white sparkles of those cursed stars.⁴⁵

In "The Country House" one feels that Miss Lowell over-uses, or misuses, the mauves and blues, especially in the third line:

Did the door move, or was it always ajar?
 The gladioli on the table are pale mauve.
 I smell pale mauve and blue,
 Blue soft like bruises--putrid--oozing--
 The air oozes blue--mauve--
 And the door with the black line where it does not shut!⁴⁶

A good treatment of storm colors is found in "Before

⁴⁴ Men, Women and Ghosts, pp. 351-352.

⁴⁵ Can Grande's Castle, pp. 43-44.

⁴⁶ Pictures of the Floating World, p. 75.

the Storm." A few lines from part III will be given here:

The sky is lowering and black, a strange blue-black-
ness, which makes red houses pink, and green
leaves purple. Over the blowing purple trees,
the sky is an iron-blue, split with forks of
straw-yellow.⁴⁷

The use of yellow in the first few lines of "Basket
Dance" from "Songs of the Pueblo Indians" is interesting:

Dance!
Dance!
The priest is yellow with sunflower meal,
He is yellow with corn-meal,
He is yellow as the sun.
Dance!
Dance!
His little bells are ringing,
The bells tinkle like sunlight,
The sun is rising.⁴⁸

In concluding this section, the following lines from
"Memorandum Confided by a Yucca to a Passion-Vine" are given
as an excellent illustration of Miss Lowell's use of beau-
tiful and exotic colors:

Morning playing dimly in the passion-vines
Hanging over the gates of Cuzco.
Morning picking out a purple flower--
Another--another--
Cascading down the walls of Cuzco.
Scarlet-flashing, uprose the sun
With one deep bell-note of a copper-crashed gong.
Glory of rose-mist over the Sierra,
Glory of crimson on the tinted turrets
Of the wide old fort under the high cliff.
Glory of vermilion dripping from the windows,
Glory of saffron streaking all the shadows,

⁴⁷

Legends, p. 244.

⁴⁸

Ballads for Sale, p. 305.

House fronts glaring in fresh young light,
 Gold over Cuzco!
 Gold!
 Gold!49

In concluding this chapter, I want to express my opinion that of all the devices in Miss Lowell's poetic technique--including free verse, polyphonic prose, symbolism, and imagism--her "colorism" is predominant in that it runs consistently through all her writing. In all her various forms she uses an abundance of color. Colors flash from her pages, and the reader cannot help being acutely aware of them.

CHAPTER VI

RECAPITULATION AND CONCLUSION

A person cannot fail to recognize the merit and originality of Amy Lowell's poetic technique. She has been accused, and perhaps justly at times, of sacrificing emotion and content to form. Her experiments in technique, however, have served to open the way for greater freedom in poetic expression. In her campaign for Imagism and the New Poetry, Miss Lowell contributed fundamentally to a revitalization of American literature. "Even those who despised Free Verse and Imagism," says Damon, "found themselves writing with greater clarity and conciseness and intensity and truthfulness."¹

When Miss Lowell first came under the influence of the Imagist movement, she eagerly adopted its free verse as her main medium of expression. She was not satisfied, however, with the form as it stood and immediately set to work experimenting and striving for greater range and flexibility of expression; consequently some of her free verse is an original contribution to the large body of poetry written in this form. Miss Lowell, through the prefaces to some of her volumes of poetry and through articles and lectures, also

¹

S. Foster Damon, Amy Lowell: A Chronicle, p. 727.

has done much to interpret free verse to the public.

Even more original than her work with free verse is her discovery, so to speak, of polyphonic prose. This form proved quite flexible in her hands; nevertheless, with the exception of John Gould Fletcher's experiments, it has not been used to any extent by other poets.

Miss Lowell's symbolism, another device, is no doubt original in many respects but contributes little, in my opinion, to the total effect of her technique. Contrary to her practice in connection with other phases of her poetry, she gives little explanation of her symbolistic writing.

Considering her imagism, however, one finds some of the most beautiful and clear-cut images in American poetry. But of all her devices, I feel that "colorism" is the most outstanding one, at any rate outstanding in the sense that it runs through all her writing. In no other works of Twentieth Century America can a person discover such a blaze of colors. On some occasions an overuse of color seems to batter one's senses; still Miss Lowell's "colorism" is typical of her exuberance, and her abundant use of color gives a distinctly original mark to her writing.

After having studied Amy Lowell's poetry, I feel that in it I have discovered certain devices that will contribute to the writing of more graphic and concise prose. Further,

I feel that this research has been profitable beyond the immediate preparation of this paper, in that it has given me a better foundation for understanding the origins and trends of the present movement in American poetry. Using this research on Amy Lowell as a starting point, I hope eventually to investigate the entire field of American poetry since 1900.

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