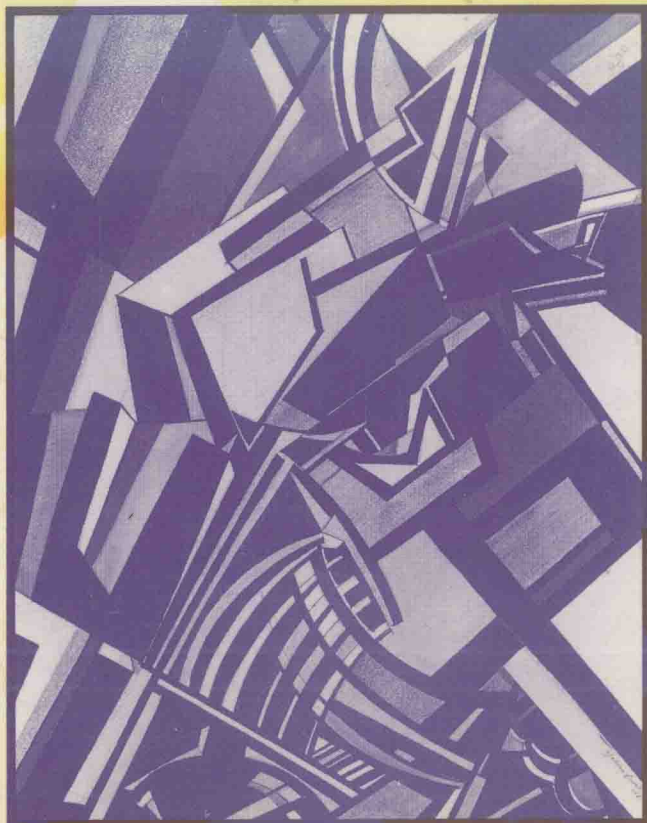


ALAN ROBINSON



POETRY,
PAINTING
AND IDEAS,
1885-1914

POETRY, PAINTING AND IDEAS, 1885–1914

Alan Robinson

M
MACMILLAN

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To my father and in memory of my mother

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Preface

There is, I contend, an unbroken continuity in *avant-garde* aesthetics from the *fin de siècle* to Vorticism. To demonstrate this requires an unusually broad-based investigation; I seek therefore to bring to light the striking congruity of the art and literature of the period, emphasising the pervasive transcendentalism which present-day critics have undervalued. Developing this approach, I argue further for a radical reinterpretation of the relationship between Yeats and Pound.

The characteristic tendency in aesthetics from the 1890s to the First World War was to regard all the art-forms as complementary expressions of the same anti-materialist sensibility. Artists and writers voiced this in a stylistic register whose metaphysical connotations have been neglected by later literary and art-historians, enabling them to reduce discussion of the pre-war movements to matters of technique. The period is accordingly treated as a chaos of heterogeneous and apparently disparate 'isms'. I venture to challenge the adequacy of this wholly formalistic approach and hence to reveal instead of confusing divergence a shared post-Impressionist ideology.

On the basis of manifestos and articles published in the many 'little magazines' I seek to demonstrate the period's veritable saturation in an animistic aesthetics. This developed from the anti-positivist revolution of the *fin de siècle* into the syncretic assimilation of Bergsonism, Theosophism and pantheism which characterised the literary and artistic *avant-garde* in the late Edwardian era.

Pound's adherence to this aesthetic consensus means that modern accounts of Imagism/Vorticism in poetry (the terms are interchangeable) misinterpret its aesthetic in attempting to present it as breaking with Symbolism and looking forward formalistically to the *Cantos*. Far from marking a reorientation, as the received critical view has proposed, Pound's aesthetic in this period is, I argue, completely cognate with the transcendentalist animism which characterised several major movements in the contemporary visual

arts. And, while previous critics have maintained that Pound was reacting unreservedly against Yeats, the development suggested here is rather that Pound reproduces the pattern of Yeats's own post-1903 aesthetic and psychological theories.

A. R.

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Abbreviations and Notes on the Text

The place of publication of books cited is London unless otherwise specified. The following authors are identified by surname only: T. E. Hulme, George Moore, Ezra Pound, Edward Storer, Arthur Symons, W. B. Yeats.

The following abbreviations are employed in text and notes. References to *CJ*, *FS*, *Spec*, *WdB* and *WWR* are made in the text wherever convenient.

<i>CJ</i>	Immanuel Kant, <i>Critique of Judgement</i> , trs. J. C. Meredith (Oxford, 1952).
<i>FS</i>	T. E. Hulme, <i>Further Speculations</i> , ed. Samuel Hynes (Minneapolis, 1955).
HRC, Texas	Humanities Research Center, the University of Texas at Austin.
NEAC	New English Art Club
NKV	Neue Künstlervereinigung
<i>Spec</i>	T. E. Hulme, <i>Speculations</i> , ed. Herbert Read, 2nd edn (1936).
<i>WdB</i>	Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Werke in drei Bänden</i> , ed. Karl Schlechta, 6th edn (1969; repr. Frankfurt-am-Main, Berlin and Vienna, 1976–9).
<i>WWR</i>	Arthur Schopenhauer, <i>The World as Will and Representation</i> , (1819; 2nd, enlarged edn, 1844), trs. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols (Indian Hills, Colorado, 1958).

Abbreviations used in relation to material at HRC, Texas

ALI	autograph letter initialled
ALS	autograph letter signed
AMS	autograph manuscript

APCS	autograph postcard signed
TLS	typed letter signed
TMS	typed manuscript
TS with A	
additions	typescript with autograph additions

The following works by Pound and Yeats, cited in more than one chapter, are referred to by title only (in an abbreviated form where this is indicated in square brackets). The editions cited are as follows.

Pound

Collected Early Poems of Ezra Pound, ed. Michael John King (1977). [*Early Poems.*]

Collected Shorter Poems, 2nd edn (1968). [*Shorter Poems.*]

Gaudier-Brzeska: A Memoir (1916), enlarged edn 1970 (paperback repr. New York, 1974). [*Gaudier-Brzeska.*]

Guide to Kulchur (1938; repr. 1966).

Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot, paperback edn (1960). [*Literary Essays.*]

Patria Mia and The Treatise on Harmony (1962). [*Patria Mia.*]

Pound/Joyce. The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce; with Pound's Essays on Joyce, ed. Forrest Read (1968). [*Pound/Joyce.*]

The Selected Letters of Ezra Pound 1907–1941, ed. D. D. Paige, paperback edn (New York, 1971). [*Letters.*]

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The Translations of Ezra Pound, enlarged edn (1970). [*Translations.*]

Yeats

Autobiographies (1955).

Essays and Introductions (1961).

Explorations (1962).

The Letters of W. B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade (1954) [*Letters.*]

Letters to the New Island, ed. Horace Reynolds (1934).

Memoirs, ed. Denis Donoghue (1972).

Uncollected Prose by W. B. Yeats, ed. John P. Frayne and Colton Johnson, 2 vols (1970 and 1975). [*Uncollected Prose.*]

The Variorum Edition of the Plays of W. B. Yeats, ed. Russell K. Alspach (1966). [*Variorum Plays*.]

The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York, 1957). [*Variorum Poems*.]

For all works to which the above conventions do not apply, full details are given on the first reference in each chapter, with abbreviation as convenient on subsequent reference.

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1 The Perceiving Imagination

The problem confronting the literary historian of a period as eclectic and cosmopolitan as the early twentieth century is as daunting as that which James expressed in the Preface to *Roderick Hudson*: 'Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so.'¹ The radius of my circle extends to Romanticism, that nebulous phenomenon which, although the origin of the themes of all later chapters, can here only be treated in a simplified schema, whose aims and scope I shall now clarify.

My prime objective is to establish a philosophical model and a vocabulary for later discussions. The use of aesthetic theory enables me to abbreviate my exposition and to take a representative cross-section of complex problems otherwise requiring extensive illustration. An examination of German Romantic aesthetics has two further advantages for my later argument. First, it rehearses conveniently a variety of responses to the crisis of a desacralised world, which was repeated in an accentuated form in the late nineteenth century. The Romantic search for a compensatory animistic cosmology, giving primacy to the artistic imagination as an intuitive means of access to noumena or things-in-themselves, forms a paradigm and in many cases an influential source for the Modernist generation. Secondly, it raises as a corollary the crucial problem of how such insights may be embodied in art, anticipating strikingly the concerns of Symbolism and Imagism. Some general considerations will serve to introduce these technical issues.

The central question in the Romantic period was the relationship between man and his environment. The Enlightenment had provoked a crucial change in *Weltanschauung*. Rational and scientific inquiry could no longer support the traditional view of nature as a vast system of interrelated beings and the belief that it embodied a