

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

TCLC 296

Volume 296

# Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

**Criticism of the  
Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,  
Short-Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers  
Who Lived between 1900 and 1999,  
from the First Published Critical  
Appraisals to Current Evaluations**



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## Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

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Volumes 1 through 87 of TCLC featured authors who died between 1900 and 1959; beginning with Volume 88, the series expanded to include authors who died between 1900 and 1999. Beginning with Volume 26, every fourth volume of TCLC was devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers. With TCLC 285, the series returns to a standard author approach, with some entries devoted to a single important work of world literature and others devoted to literary topics.

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- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author's actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical introduction. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the author's name (if applicable).
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# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Advisory Board xiii

<b>Richard Aldington 1892-1962</b> .....	1
<i>English poet, novelist, short-story writer, essayist, biographer, translator, and critic</i>	
<b>María Luisa Bombal 1910-1980</b> .....	81
<i>Chilean novelist and short-story writer</i>	
<b>Elizabeth Stuart Phelps 1844-1911</b> .....	195
<i>American novelist, children's-fiction author, short-story writer, poet, and essayist</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 345

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 465

*TCLC* Cumulative Nationality Index 487

*TCLC-296* Title Index 495

# Richard Aldington

## 1892-1962

(Born Edward Godfrey Aldington) English poet, novelist, short-story writer, essayist, biographer, translator, and critic.

The following entry provides criticism of Aldington's life and works. For additional information about Aldington, see *CLC*, Volume 49.

### INTRODUCTION

Richard Aldington was an English writer whose reputation was shaped by his early Imagist poetry, his partially autobiographical World War I novel *Death of a Hero* (1929), and his controversial biography of T. E. Lawrence, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1955). Though Aldington is often overlooked in favor of other writers of the 1920s with whom he was associated, the most famous being Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot, he remains an important figure for his broad-ranging contributions to British letters. At various points in his career, Aldington was engaged in the fields of poetry, the novel, the short story, the essay, biography, translation, and criticism. Though his literary significance has been the subject of some debate, recent critics have argued for a reappraisal of his lesser works, agreeing with Hugh Cecil (1996; see Further Reading) that concentrating solely on his best-known efforts obscures Aldington's position as "one of Britain's most prolific twentieth-century men of letters."

Though diverse in genre and thematically complex, Aldington's body of work is too often characterized by his biting satires and Realist social commentary following World War I. The psychological and intellectual impact of his time as a soldier—he joined the army in 1916 and fought on the Western Front until the end of the war—is apparent in much of his writing. His indignation and outrage at the atrocities of the war lasted throughout his life and have been frequently identified by Aldington's critics as the mainspring of his work. Cecil characterized Aldington as a "wounded lion," claiming that "the often intemperate passion of Aldington's writing" can be traced to the trauma of his wartime experience.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Aldington was born on 8 July 1892 and adopted the name Richard as a boy. He spent much of his youth in rural Kent, attending Dover College before a short stay at University College London, which he was forced to leave when his father was unable to pay tuition due to financial difficulty.

While still in his teens, Aldington was initiated into the literary circle that included American poet Pound, who was particularly influential then, and the poet Hilda Doolittle (H. D.), whom Aldington married in 1913. Pound coined the description of H. D.'s and Aldington's poetry as 'Imagist,' which gave their movement a discrete identity in London's complex prewar literary network, and Aldington became known as a promising young novelist, poet, editor, critic, and translator. While still in his twenties, he was featured in Pound's inaugural anthology of Imagist poetry, *Des Imagistes* (1914), alongside such writers as Pound, H. D., James Joyce, and William Carlos Williams.

As with many writers of his generation, World War I gave Aldington his defining subject. He attempted to sign up in 1914 but was judged unfit for service due to an operation he had undergone in 1910. He enlisted in 1916, even though by that time he had already become disillusioned with the war effort. Aldington left for France at the end of 1916 and served with distinction, continuing to write and edit during his military service. By the time he was demobilized in 1919, however, he exhibited symptoms of what was at the time called shell shock and psychological trauma, and his marriage was affected. Both H. D. and Aldington believed in the ideal of free love, but Aldington's absence during the war strained their relationship. H. D. had an affair with the musician Cecil Gray, by whom she became pregnant, and Aldington with Dorothy "Arabella" Yorke, who remained his partner through the 1920s. Though H. D. and Aldington's marriage effectively ended when he returned on leave at the Armistice, he became the legal father of H. D.'s daughter by Gray to save the child from the stigma of illegitimacy. They did not divorce until much later, and in later life they corresponded extensively and occasionally met from the 1940s onward.

Aldington returned to the literary world in the 1920s primarily as critic and translator. His creative output was dramatically reduced, the result, he suspected, of damage to his poetic sensibilities caused by the war. He felt that his work seemed retrograde in the context of that of his literary peers, notably Eliot. During this period, Aldington's relationships with other members of his prewar circle became strained or broken. He had turned from poetry to the novel by the end of the decade, producing the semiautobiographical *Death of a Hero*. A series of prose works, all featuring the war and its aftermath as a dominant theme, followed, including the short-story collection *Roads to Glory* (1930) and the novels *The Colonel's Daughter* (1931), and *All Men Are Enemies* (1933).

Despite some professional success, Aldington's personal life was marked by financial uncertainty and romantic turmoil. In 1928, he left Yorke in Britain to live and work in France and Italy, having fallen in love with Brigit Patmore. After eight years, he became involved with Netta Patmore, Brigit's daughter-in-law. They married in 1938 and had a daughter, Catherine. Aldington lived in the United States during World War II, working for a time in Hollywood as a screenwriter. He and his family returned to Europe in 1946, but his marriage to Netta broke down in 1950. Aldington continued to produce both literary and nonliterary works, including biographies of the Duke of Wellington, D. H. Lawrence, Robert Louis Stevenson, and T. E. Lawrence. The extraordinary controversy generated by his unflattering biography of T. E. Lawrence, whom he called a "half-fraud," irreparably damaged the reputations of both biographer and subject. Nevertheless, Aldington pursued a series of projects in the years preceding his death in Suryen-Vaux, Cher, France, on 27 July 1962.

## MAJOR WORKS

Aldington gained early literary recognition as a founder of the self-consciously avant-garde Imagist movement. Pound produced a manifesto for the group in 1913, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste," outlining some principles of modern verse that he formulated in collaboration with H. D. and Aldington. Imagism self-consciously broke from the ornate, self-indulgent poetry of the nineteenth century, which Pound described as "a rather blurry, messy sort of period, a rather sentimentalistic mannerish sort of period." He instead advocated free verse and extreme economy of diction, insisting, "[u]se no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something." Aldington's poems from this period demonstrate this hard and spare style with a rigorous concentration on concise images, although his early works also display a classicist's taste for Hellenism.

Upon returning from the Western Front, Aldington published works—all concerned principally with his war experiences—that showed the influence of the Imagist movement. These included two volumes of poetry written during active service and published in 1919, *Images of War* and *Images of Desire*. Adrian Barlow (1986) claimed that in *Exile and Other Poems* (1923) and *Collected Poems* (1928) Aldington revealed a "powerful and disturbing voice of his own, articulating . . . the shock of survival and the afterlife of the war." Many of Aldington's poems from this period seem irredeemably bitter, destructive, and savagely ironic. Indeed, critics have argued that Aldington's work carries traces of long-term trauma. "In the Library" expresses Aldington's fatigued demeanor: "utterly weary now that it is over, / weary as the lost Argonauts beating / hopelessly for home / against the implacable storm."

In the late 1920s, Aldington turned to the novel, the form in which he judged himself to have produced his best

work. His classic *Death of a Hero* is the first-person narrative of a comrade of Captain George Winterbourne, the "hero" of the novel, and the work traces Winterbourne's journey from common soldier to captain and, ultimately, to his death. Like Erich Maria Remarque's *Im Westen nichts Neues* (1929), the novel contains shocking portrayals of everyday life in the trenches as well as a biting assessment of the hypocrisy and stupidity of the war's supporters. Winterbourne, a representative of the intellectual class, returns home to find himself suddenly out of place among "polite" British society, which had consigned its young men to wartime horrors for which they were wholly unprepared. Cecil called it "one of the most bitter and rebellious novels about the Western Front."

Later in his life, Aldington was primarily a biographer. He won acclaim for his work on the Duke of Wellington, and, later, notoriety for his biography of T. E. Lawrence. Aldington's debunking of what he saw as the self-created myth of "Lawrence of Arabia" scandalized the British establishment and was subjected to attempted suppression by Lawrence's sympathizers. Though much of what Aldington asserted is now accepted as fact, he faced a barrage of accusations of bias and deliberate misrepresentation. In his review of Aldington's biography, Lowell Thomas (1955) found the work "slanted and distorted" and at odds with his own experience of Lawrence.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critics of Aldington's poetry have paid particular attention to his contributions to the Imagist movement. Diana Collecott (1997) used the debate between Aldington and Pound concerning Hellenism to illuminate Pound's artistic break from poets in the Imagist group, as well as to describe Pound's "virile version of modernism" and his distaste for homosexuality, which some Hellenists felt was an expression of the Greek spirit. Michael Copp (2008; see Further Reading) considered the long-range impact of the Imagist poets, including Aldington, tracing their influence on other contemporary poets. However, Barlow claimed that an excessive focus on Aldington's Imagist verse has led critics to undervalue his larger body of poetic work.

Critics of Aldington's prose fiction have focused their attention on *Death of a Hero*. David Ayers (1998) suggested that *Death of a Hero* is a proto-Fascist "attack on an age which had betrayed its heroes, an embittered rejection of prewar idealism, and a selective exposure of the role of fantasy structure in war psychology." Other critics have attempted to broaden readers' understanding of Aldington by concentrating on his lesser-known works. Daniel Kempton (2003) focused his discussion on *Introduction to Mistral* (1956), a biography of the Provençal poet Frédéric Mistral in which praise for communal life seemingly contradicts the notion of Aldington as an "arch individualist." "In Mistral's

Provence,” Kempton argued, “it may be that Aldington at last found a collective life to which he could give himself, if only in his imagination.”

Another thread of criticism examined the treatment of masculinity in Aldington’s work. Andrew Frayn (2005) proposed that Aldington’s fictions are structured around two complementary binaries—the distinction between the artistic world and the military world, and that between love and sexual freedom.

Franklyn Hyde

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

*Images (1910-1915)*. London: Poetry Bookshop, 1915. Rev. and expanded ed. *Images Old and New*. Boston: Four Seas, 1916. Expanded ed. *Images*. London: Egoist, 1919. (Poetry)

*The Poems of Anyte of Tegea*. By Anyte of Tegea. Trans. Richard Aldington. London: Egoist, 1915. (Poetry)

*Melkii bes* [published as *The Little Demon*]. By Feodor Sogolub. Trans. Aldington and John Cournos as *The Little Demon*. New York: Knopf, 1916. (Novel)

\**The Love Poems of Myrrhine and Konallis, a Cycle of Prose Poems Written after the Greek Manner*. Cleveland: Clerk’s, 1917. Expanded ed. *The Love of Myrrhine and Konallis and Other Prose Poems*. Chicago: Covici, 1926. (Poetry)

*Reverie: A Little Book of Poems for H. D.* Cleveland: Clerk’s, 1917. (Poetry)

*Greek Songs in the Manner of Anacreon*. London: Egoist, 1919. (Poetry)

*Images of Desire*. London: Mathews, 1919. (Poetry)

*Images of War: A Book of Poems*. Westminster: Beaumont, 1919. Expanded ed. London: Allen and Unwin, 1919. Expanded ed. *War and Love (1915-1918)*. Boston: Four Seas, 1919. (Poetry)

*Medallions in Clay*. By Anyte of Tegea et al. Trans. Aldington. New York: Knopf, 1921. Pub. as *Medallions from Anyte of Tegea, Meleager of Gadara, the Anacreontea: Latin Poets of the Renaissance*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1930. (Poetry)

*Exile and Other Poems*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1923. (Poetry)

*French Comedies of the XVIIIth Century*. By Jean-François Regnard et al. Trans. Aldington. London: Routledge, 1923. (Plays)

*Voyages to the Moon and the Sun*. By Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac. Trans. Aldington. London: Routledge, 1923. (Satire)

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*Literary Studies and Reviews*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1924. (Essays)

*The Mystery of the Nativity, Translated from the Liégeois of the XVth Century*. Trans. Aldington. London: Allen and Unwin, 1924. (Play)

*Sturly*. By Pierre Custot. Trans. Aldington. London: Cape, 1924. (Novel)

*A Fool i’ the Forest: A Phantasmagoria*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1925. (Poetry)

*Voltaire*. London: Routledge, 1925. (Biography)

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*Les quinze joyes de mariage* [published as *The Fifteen Joys of Marriage*]. By Antoine de La Sale. Trans. Aldington as *The Fifteen Joys of Marriage, Ascribed to Antoine de La Sale, c. 1388-c. 1462*. London: Routledge, 1926. (Satire)

*Candide and Other Romances*. By Voltaire. Trans. Aldington. London: Routledge, 1927. (Novella and short stories)

*D. H. Lawrence: An Indiscretion*. Seattle: U of Washington Book Store, 1927. Pub. as *D. H. Lawrence*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1930. Rev. and expanded ed. *D. H. Lawrence: An Appreciation*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950. (Criticism)

*Letters of Madame de Sévigné to Her Daughter and Her Friends*. Ed. Aldington. London: Routledge, 1927. (Letters)

*Letters of Voltaire and Frederick the Great*. Trans. Aldington. London: Routledge, 1927. (Letters)

*Collected Poems*. New York: Covici-Friede, 1928. (Poetry)

*Remy de Gourmont: A Modern Man of Letters*. Seattle: U of Washington Book Store, 1928. (Criticism)

*Remy de Gourmont: Selections from All His Works*. By Remy de Gourmont. Trans. Aldington. Chicago: Covici, 1928.

*La trahison des clercs* [published as *The Treason of the Intellectuals*]. By Julien Benda. Trans. Aldington as *The Treason of the Intellectuals*. New York: Morrow, 1928. (Philosophy)

*Death of a Hero: A Novel*. New York: Covici-Friede, 1929. Rev. and expanded ed. 2 vols. Paris: Babou and Kahane, 1930. Rev. ed. London: Sphere, 1965. (Novel)

*The Eaten Heart*. Chapelle-Reanville: Hours, 1929. Expanded ed. London: Chatto and Windus, 1933. (Poetry)



- Alcestis*. By Euripides. Trans. Aldington. London: Chatto and Windus, 1930. (Play)
- At All Costs*. London: Heinemann, 1930. (Short stories)
- The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio*. By Giovanni Boccaccio. Trans. Aldington. New York: Covici-Friede, 1930. (Allegory)
- Last Straws*. Paris: Hours, 1930. (Short story)
- Love and the Luxembourg*. New York: Covici-Friede, 1930. Pub. as *A Dream in the Luxembourg*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1930. (Poetry)
- Roads to Glory*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1930. (Short stories)
- Two Stories*. London: Mathews and Marrot, 1930. (Short stories)
- The Colonel's Daughter: A Novel*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1931. (Novel)
- Stepping Heavenward: A Record*. Florence: Orioli, 1931. (Satire)
- Soft Answers: Five Stories*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1932. (Short stories)
- All Men Are Enemies: A Romance*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1933. (Novel)
- Last Poems*. By D. H. Lawrence. Ed. Aldington and Giuseppe Orioli. New York: Viking, 1933. (Poetry)
- Selected Poems*. By Lawrence. Ed. Aldington. London: Secker, 1933. (Poetry)
- The Poems of Richard Aldington*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1934. (Poetry)
- Women Must Work: A Novel*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1934. (Novel)
- Artifex: Sketches and Ideas*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1935. (Sketches)
- D. H. Lawrence: A Complete List of His Works, together with a Critical Appreciation*. London: Heinemann, 1935. (Criticism)
- Life Quest*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1935. (Poetry)
- The Spirit of Place: An Anthology Compiled from the Prose of D. H. Lawrence*. By Lawrence. Ed. Aldington. London: Heinemann, 1935. (Prose)
- Life of a Lady: A Play*. With Derek Patmore. Garden City: Doubleday, 1936. (Play)
- The Crystal World*. London: Heinemann, 1937. (Poetry)
- Very Heaven*. London: Heinemann, 1937. (Novel)
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- Rejected Guest: A Novel*. New York: Viking, 1939. (Novel)
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- Life for Life's Sake: A Book of Reminiscences*. New York: Viking, 1941. (Memoir)
- The Viking Book of Poetry of the English-Speaking World*. Ed. Aldington. New York: Viking, 1941. Pub. as *Poetry of the English-Speaking World*. London: Heinemann, 1947. (Poetry)
- The Duke: Being an Account of the Life and Achievements of Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington*. New York: Viking, 1943. Pub. as *Wellington: Being an Account of the Life and Achievements of Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington*. London: Heinemann, 1946. (Biography)
- The Portable Oscar Wilde*. By Oscar Wilde. Ed. Aldington. New York: Viking, 1946. Pub. as *Oscar Wilde: Selected Works*. London: Heinemann, 1946. (Aphorisms, criticism, essays, letters, plays, and poems)
- The Romance of Casanova: A Novel*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946. (Novel)
- The Complete Poems of Richard Aldington*. London: Wingate, 1948. (Poetry)
- Four English Portraits, 1801-1851*. London: Evans, 1948. (Biographies)
- Jane Austen*. Pasadena: Ampersand, 1948. (Biography)
- Walter Pater: Selected Works*. By Walter Pater. Ed. Aldington. London: Heinemann, 1948. (Essays, novel, and prose)
- The Strange Life of Charles Waterton, 1782-1865*. London: Evans, 1949. (Biography)
- Portrait of a Genius but ... The Life of D. H. Lawrence, 1885-1930*. London: Heinemann, 1950. Pub. as *D. H. Lawrence: Portrait of a Genius but ...* New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1950. (Biography)
- The Religion of Beauty: Selections from the Aesthetes*. Ed. Aldington. London: Heinemann, 1950. (Poetry and prose)
- Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot: A Lecture*. Hurst: Peacocks, 1954. (Lecture)
- Pinorman: Personal Recollections of Norman Douglas, Pino Orioli, and Charles Prentice*. London: Heinemann, 1954. (Memoir)
- A. E. Housman and W. B. Yeats: Two Lectures*. Hurst: Peacocks, 1955. (Lectures)
- Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Enquiry*. London: Collins, 1955. (Biography)
- Introduction to Mistral*. London: Heinemann, 1956. (Biography)

- Frauds*. London: Heinemann, 1957. (Nonfiction)
- Portrait of a Rebel: The Life and Works of Robert Louis Stevenson*. London: Evans, 1957. (Biography)
- Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*. Trans. Aldington and Delano Ames. New York: Prometheus, 1959. (Nonfiction)
- Richard Aldington: Selected Critical Writings, 1928-1960*. Ed. Alister Kershaw. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1960. (Criticism)
- A Passionate Prodigality: Letters to Alan Bird from Richard Aldington, 1949-1962*. Ed. Miriam J. Benkovitz. New York: New York Public Lib., 1975. (Letters)
- Literary Lifelines: The Richard Aldington-Lawrence Durrell Correspondence*. Ed. Ian S. McNiven and Harry T. Moore. New York: Viking, 1981. (Letters)
- Bubb Booklets: Letters of Richard Aldington to Charles Clinch Bubb*. Ed. Dean H. Keller. Francetown: Typographeum, 1988. (Letters)
- Richard Aldington: An Autobiography in Letters*. Ed. Norman T. Gates. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1992. (Letters)
- An Imagist at War: The Complete War Poems of Richard Aldington*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2002. (Poetry)

\*Includes "In the Library."

## CRITICISM

### Marjorie Allen Seiffert (review date 1919)

SOURCE: Seiffert, Marjorie Allen. "Soldier and Lover." Rev. of *War and Love*, by Richard Aldington. *Poetry* 14.1 (1919): 338-41. Print.

[In the following review, Seiffert criticizes Aldington's poetry collection *Images of War*, which was expanded as *War and Love* (1915-1918), claiming that "he does not make great poetry, and he fails of being understood by the audience for which he is writing." Aldington, she asserts, produces poems that are only "bitter, muffled complaints of rebellion."]

This book was written, so the author says, "less for myself and others who are interested in subtleties, and more for the kind of men I lived with in the camp and in the line"; and the book is convincing proof that a deliberate assumption of an alien point of view destroys all that is most valuable, most poignant, in a poet's genius. Aldington is not, cannot be, of the rank and file. For him life has delicate meanings, exquisite pleasures, poignancies of feeling. He assumes that these are incomprehensible to his comrades, and seeks to "represent the inarticulate feelings of the ordinary civilized man thrust suddenly into these extraordinary and hellish circumstances." In so doing he fails both

ways: he does not make great poetry, and he fails of being understood by the audience for which he is writing. In his own words, "That they did not understand very much is a matter for cheerful acceptance."

A soldier writing to this magazine of Aldington's *Choricos*, a poem on death written at about eighteen, spoke of reading it to soldiers of the line, and of hearing it recited in a dugout by another soldier when they were under heavy shell-fire and in the imminent presence of death. With all its idealism it was for them a poignant and beautiful challenge to the spirit. Though written before the war and without thought of Tommy Atkins as an audience, it succeeds where "this book by a common soldier for common soldiers" cannot touch them at any point. The clearest cry of the spirit reaches ears we imagine to be deaf. But the war poems in this book are only bitter, muffled complaints of rebellion.

Here is part of one of the best of them, *Bondage*:

I have been a spendthrift—  
Dropping from lazy fingers  
Quiet colored hours,  
Fluttering away from me  
Like oak and beech leaves in October.

I have lived keenly and wastefully.  
Like a bush or a sun insect;  
Lived sensually and thoughtfully,  
Loving the flesh and beauty of this world—  
Green ivy about ruined towers,  
The outpouring of the grey sea,  
And the ecstasy  
Of a pale clear sky at sunset.

.....

I long vainly for solitude  
And the lapse of silent hours;  
I am frantic to throw off  
My heavy cloth and leather garments,  
To set free my feet and body;  
And I am so far from beauty  
That a yellow daisy seems to clutch my heart  
With eager searching petals;  
And I am grateful to humility  
For the taste of pure, clean bread.

In the second part, *Love*, the poet has grown more sensual, less idealistic, than in *Images [Images of War]*; yet one cannot say that his art has lessened. He brings to this experience a spirit so hungry for beauty that it cannot be fed enough; the only peace he conceives is death in the arms of the beloved. It is of the flesh, yet delicate, rare, torturingly beautiful. Into physical love he pours all the pent-up streams of emotion that once found their way toward other manifestations of earth; for now his spirit is too languid, too numb with suffering, to respond to earth-beauty. The spiritual experience of war has for him been overshadowed by the shrinking of his body from dirt, evil smells, vermin, cold, fatigue. I quote a few fragments of poems, as the best ones are too long to print in their entirety:

Everlasting as the sea round the islands,  
 I cry at your door for love, more love;  
 Everlasting as the roll of the sea  
 My blood beats always for you, for you;  
 Everlasting as the unchangeable sea  
 I cry the infinite for space to love you!  
 .....

I am insatiate, desperate—  
 Death, if need be, or you near me,  
 Loving me, beautifully piercing me to life!  
 But not this, not this bitterness, this grief,  
 This long torture of absence!  
 .....

She has but to turn her head  
 And lay her lips to mine  
 For all my blood to throb tumultuously—  
 She is so shudderingly beautiful.

Perhaps it is more profitable for a poet to suffer in the spirit than in the body. Aldington's genius could not use the crude, painful and bitter experience he was made to undergo. Not many poets have been able to mould into beauty such material. The ones who succeed best are those more robust, coarse-fibered, those who meet the challenge and ignore, perhaps scarcely feel, the filth. They are poets of a different order from Aldington.

#### H. Monroe (review date 1929)

SOURCE: Monroe, H. "An Imagist at War." Rev. of *Collected Poems*, by Richard Aldington. *Poetry* 34 (1929): 42-6. Print.

[In the following review, Monroe offers a favorable assessment of Aldington's *Collected Poems*, noting that his "instrument is free verse of a more or less imagistic pattern" before praising him for often attaining an "effect of beauty rare in modern poetry."]

This book takes me back to Poetry's first exciting experimental years. It was in its second number—November 1912—that this young English poet, then twenty or less, made his first appearance with an ode under a Greek title which he afterwards anglicized as *Choricos*. And our biographical note informed the world that Richard Aldington belonged to a group who called themselves *Imagistes*, and worked under a stern technical discipline which they had formulated and imposed. It was the first time that epoch making word had received the dignity of print. It was then a modest whisper in a new little magazine, uttered quite unconsciously, when no one knew it would blare out before long as a revolutionary slogan.

Well, today *Choricos* opens the *Collected Poems*, divested of the Greek title which was so troublesome to its first editor and printer. It was a beautiful poem then, and it has lost nothing of its beauty today—reading it once more, as often during these seventeen years, I still think it one of the finest death-songs in the language; of a beauty pure and sculpturesque, whitely carved in marble.

For youth lives under the threat of death, before life grows loud and clamorous. And this poem is youth's glamorous vision of death, beautiful under its mask of terror. It was an ironic destiny which led this poet-youth, so soon after, into the front-line trenches of the world's worst war, and changed the glamour into horrible realism. It was a long way, a bitterly cruel way, the poet had to travel—reluctantly, protestingly—from *Choricos* to *The Blood of the Young Men*. Listen to the change—here are a few lines from the earlier poem:

O death,  
 Thou art an healing wind  
 That blowest over white flowers  
 A-tremble with dew;  
 Thou art a wind flowing  
 Over far leagues of lonely sea;  
 Thou art the dusk and the fragrance;  
 Thou art the lips of love mournfully smiling, ...  
 Thou art the silence of beauty.  
 And we look no more for the morning,  
 We yearn no more for the sun,  
 Since with thy white hands,  
 Death,  
 Thou crownest us with the pallid chaplets,  
 The slim colorless poppies  
 Which in thy garden alone  
 Softly thou gatherest.

And here is the first poem of the series called *The Blood of the Young Men*:

Give us back the close veil of the senses!  
 Let us not see—ah, hide from us—  
 The red blood splashed upon the walls,  
 The good red blood, the young, the lovely blood  
 Trampled unseeingly by passing feet,  
 Feet of the old men, feet of the cold cruel women,  
 Feet of the careless children, endlessly passing.

The reaction to war, as with so many young minds caught in its tortuous toils, was cynicism—bitter disbelief in life, its values and its gods. The *Images of War* are images of utter horror and disaster, that eat up souls as well as bodies; if poets of past ages have put a glamour on war, here is one poet—and there are others—who strips that glamour away with fierce and merciless irony, and thereby does his bit in the modern crusade for the outlawry of war.

The reaction is expressed in various moods. The *Images of Desire* are an absent lover's mind-pictures of his beloved—sensual images of her fleshly beauty, memories of her gift of ecstasy:

Under her feet I spread my days  
 For her walking,  
 She touches me with her hands  
 And I am faint with beauty.  
 Therefore I am not willing to die,  
 Since she needs me.  
 For her sake I would betray my comrades.

But doubt of her need of him creeps into his heart: