Poetry

CRITICISM

VOLUME

134

Poetry Criticism

Excerpts from Criticism of the Works of the Most Significant and Widely Studied Poets of World Literature

Volume 134

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Preface

Poetry Criticism (*PC*) presents significant criticism of the world's greatest poets and provides supplementary biographical and bibliographical material to guide the interested reader to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators. Although major poets and literary movements are covered in such Gale Literary Criticism series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (*CLC*), *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (*TCLC*), *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (*NCLC*), *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800* (*LC*), and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* (*CMLC*), *PC* offers more focused attention on poetry than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries on writers in these Gale series. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the generous excerpts and supplementary material provided by *PC* supply them with the vital information needed to write a term paper on poetic technique, to examine a poet's most prominent themes, or to lead a poetry discussion group.

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PC is designed to serve as an introduction to major poets of all eras and nationalities. Since these authors have inspired a great deal of relevant critical material, *PC* is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research. Each author entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that author's work. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Every attempt has been made to identify and include the most significant essays on each author's work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors sometimes reprint essays that have appeared elsewhere in Gale's Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds twenty percent of a *PC* volume.

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- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author and the critical debates surrounding his or her work.

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- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included.

- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.

- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
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Glen, Heather. "Blake's Criticism of Moral Thinking in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience.*" In *Interpreting Blake,* edited by Michael Phillips. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978. 32-69. Rpt. in *Poetry Criticism.* Edited by Michelle Lee. Vol. 63. Detroit: Gale, 2005. 34-51. Print.

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Richard Aldington
1892-1962

English poet, novelist, autobiographer, editor, translator, critic, biographer, essayist, short story writer, and playwright.

INTRODUCTION

Most widely recognized for his World War I poetry, Aldington was, for a brief time, a member of the Imagist group associated with Ezra Pound, a movement dedicated to crisp clear images and free verse that also included Aldington's wife, the poet H. D. As he matured he disavowed his connection with the Imagist School, and after the publication of his 1929 novel *Death of a Hero,* became more famous as a novelist and biographer than as a poet.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Born in Hampshire, England, on July 8, 1892, Aldington was the son of a lawyer who moved the family to Dover during Aldington's childhood. He was devoted to literature at an early age, and read voraciously, but the disjunction between the beauty of literature and the drabness of provincial living led to the disillusionment that would last his entire life. Aldington attended Dover College and then spent a year at the University of London until family circumstances forced him to drop out. In 1911, Aldington met H. D. and in 1913, they married. During these years, Aldington made the acquaintance of the leading literary figures of the pre-war era, including James Joyce, William Butler Yeats, Walter de la Mare, Ford Madox Ford, and T. E. Hulme, as well as his fellow Imagists, Ezra Pound and Amy Lowell. The Aldingtons initially lived in London near Ezra Pound, but in 1915 moved to a London neighborhood near D. H. Lawrence. In 1916, Aldington joined the army and was wounded a year later, and although he recovered physically, it is believed that he never fully recovered mentally. *Death of a Hero,* written ten years after the war ended, expressed the mental anguish and despair he experienced in combat. Shortly after the war, Aldington and H. D. separated although they did not divorce until 1937. He left England and lived in Paris for a number of years, during which time he was involved with several women. After his divorce from H. D., Aldington married Netta McCulloch. Aldington died on July 27, 1962, in the south of France.

MAJOR WORKS

Through the influence of Pound, three of Aldington's poems were published in *Poetry* magazine in 1912, and his association with the Imagist movement led to the inclusion of many of his poems in the 1914 anthology, *Des Imagistes,* as well as in *Some Imagist Poets,* Lowell's anthologies of 1915, 1916, and 1917. Aldington's first poetry collection appeared in 1915 and was entitled *Images (1910-1915),* containing a number of poems inspired by Greek and Japanese poetry, as well as poetry filled with melancholy and disillusionment. In 1917, he published a volume of prose poems, *The Love Poems of Myrrhine and Konallis.* In 1919, Aldington produced *Images of War* and *Images of Desire,* considered by many critics to contain some of the best war poetry and love poetry of the era. With these two volumes, Aldington was beginning to abandon the aesthetics of the Imagist movement and by 1923, when he published *Exile and Other Poems,* there was barely a trace of his affiliation with Imagism. From 1924 to 1937, Aldington published five long poems: *A Fool i' the Forest* (1924); *The Eaten Heart* (1929); *A Dream in the Luxembourg* (1930); *Life Quest* (1935); and *The Crystal World* (1937). After this period of intense productivity, Aldington turned from poetry to other genres, particularly novels and biographies. His most important biographies were *Wellington* (1946), for which he was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, and *Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Inquiry* (1955), a controversial book, contending that T. E. Lawrence was a homosexual and a liar.

The main collections of his work are *Collected Poems* (1928), *The Complete Poems of Richard Aldington* (1948), and *An Imagist at War: The Complete War Poems of Richard Aldington* (2002).

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Norman T. Gates provides an overview of the critical reception of Aldington's poetry, from his association with Pound in his early years, and his important role in the Imagist Movement, to his later, more independent work. Gates recounts the assessments of such scholars as Glen Hughes, C. P. Snow, Harriet Monroe of *Poetry* magazine, and many others. Despite his early

acclaim, Aldington's reputation as a poet suffered, according to Gates, because he stopped writing poetry during the last twenty-five years of his life, during which time scholars began to concentrate on his novels and biographies. Richard Eugene Smith has traced the poet's evolution during the years he produced his five long poems. Smith reports that "the five poems do not show the development of an original or characteristic mode of poetic expression, but they offer an account of the spiritual progress of a sensitive man of culture and intelligence."

A number of recent critics have called for a reevaluation of Aldington's poetry, among them Adrian Barlow, who believes that his work has been undervalued by both readers and critics. According to Barlow, "the habit of labeling him an Imagist and representing his work merely by a few over-anthologised poems has consigned his poetry to the footnotes of twentieth century literary histories." Barlow praises Aldington's war poetry, contending that "the honesty that comes from facing the facts is one of the distinctive features of Aldington's poetry," although the critic concedes that "this honesty is rarely comfortable." Caroline Zilboorg has explored the relationship between Aldington and H. D. and the effect of that relationship on Aldington's work and critical reputation. She feels that their careers were linked "to Aldington's disadvantage," and that renewed interest in H. D.'s poetry, while it should also renew interest in Aldington's poetry, has "so far essentially misrepresented him." Gemma Bristow addresses the difficulties of reassessing Aldington's work, or even of compiling a complete record of his poetry, since many of his pieces were published in obscure journals—French, English, and American—and never resurfaced for inclusion in the various collections of his work.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Poetry

Images (1910-1915) 1915
The Love Poems of Myrrhine and Konallis 1917
Images of Desire 1919
Images of War 1919; republished as *War and Love (1915-1918)* 1921
Exile and Other Poems 1923
A Fool i' the Forest: A Phantasmagoria 1924
Collected Poems 1928
Hark the Herald 1928
The Eaten Heart 1929
A Dream in the Luxembourg 1930; [published in the United States as *Love and the Luxembourg* 1930]
Collected Poems, 1915-1923 1933
The Poems of Richard Aldington 1934
Life Quest 1935
The Crystal World 1937
The Complete Poems of Richard Aldington 1948
The Poetry of Richard Aldington: A Critical Evaluation and an Anthology of Uncollected Poems [edited by Norman Timmins Gates] 1975
An Imagist at War: The Complete War Poems of Richard Aldington 2002

Other Major Works

Literary Studies and Reviews (essays) 1924
Voltaire (biography) 1925
Death of a Hero (novel) 1929
At All Costs (short stories) 1930
Heldentod (novel) 1930
Last Straws (short story) 1930
The Colonel's Daughter (novel) 1931
Roads to Glory (short stories) 1931
Stepping Heavenward: A Record (novel) 1931
All Men Are Enemies: A Romance (novel) 1933
Women Must Work (novel) 1934
Life of a Lady: A Play [with Derek Patmore] (play) 1936
Very Heaven (novel) 1937
Seven against Reeves: A Comedy-Farce (novel) 1938
Rejected Guests (novel) 1939
Life for Life's Sake (memoir) 1941
Romance of Casanova (novel) 1946
Wellington (biography) 1946
D. H. Lawrence: Portrait of a Genius But . . . (biography) 1950
Lawrence of Arabia: A Biographical Inquiry (biography) 1955
Portrait of a Rebel: The Life and Works of Robert Louis Stevenson (biography) 1957

CRITICISM

Norman T. Gates (essay date 1974)

SOURCE: Gates, Norman T. "Critical Views of Aldington's Poetry." In *The Poetry of Richard Aldington: A Critical Evaluation and an Anthology of Uncollected Poems*, pp. 3-21. University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974.

[*In the following essay, Gates provides an overview of the critical reception of Aldington's work, including assessments by Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, and William Carlos Williams.*]

The first professional criticism of Richard Aldington's work came from an excellent, if eccentric, source: Bernard Shaw. Sometime in 1908, when the young poet was sixteen or seventeen, he had his first poem published in a London periodical, and his proud mother sent a copy of it to Shaw. Aldington quotes Shaw's reply from memory:

> Madam,
>
> Your son obviously has too much literary talent to earn his living in an honest way.
>
> I enclose a guinea which he is to spend in some thoroughly selfish manner.[1]

It was probably in 1911 that Aldington met Ezra Pound and showed him some of his poems. "Well, I don't think you need any help from me," Pound is supposed to have said.[2] Certainly Pound must have been considerably impressed with the work of Aldington and H. D. Wallace Martin says that "according to Flint, Pound may have originally conceived Imagism as a means of publicizing the poetry of his friends—H. D. and Richard Aldington in particular." Martin goes on to quote from an unpublished poem of Robert Frost which joshes Pound for being "brought to bed" of "twins" who "came into the world prodigiously united in wedlock"—obviously a reference to Aldington and H. D.[3]

The years 1912-1914 were to prove the high-water mark of Pound's critical approval of Aldington's poetry. From that time on he seems to have cooled considerably. In 1915 Pound wrote to Harriet Monroe of *Poetry* magazine, in which Aldington's early Imagist poems had been published at Pound's suggestion in 1912:

> Aldington has his occasional concentrations, and for that reason it is always possible that he will do a fine thing. There is a superficial cleverness in him, then a great and lamentable gap, then the hard point, the true center, out of which a fine thing may come at any time. . . . H. D. and William C. Williams both better emotional equipment than Aldington, but lacking the superficial cleverness.

In the same year he wrote to H. L. Mencken: "Have sent word to various people that you want good stuff. Aldington for light verse. . . ." And the next year to Harriet Shaw Weaver, editor of *The Egoist,* where Aldington was still assistant editor: "I haven't read his [Aldington's] prose, but there may be more snap in it than in his verse." In 1917 Pound wrote to another lady editor, Margaret C. Anderson of *The Little Review,* about John Rodker:

> He will go further than Richard Aldington, though I don't expect anyone to believe that statement for some time. He has more invention, more guts. His father did not have a library full of classics, but he will learn.[4]

Obviously Pound's judgment was not infallible, and occasionally he let personal irritation with one or another of his protégés sway him for the moment. Writing in *The Little Review* in 1921, Pound had this to say about a piece that Aldington had written on Joyce:

> Mr. Aldington's article on Joyce in the English Review is the funniest thing that has appeared in England for some time; if he does not succeed in succeeding Edmund Gosse, he at any rate ousts Mr. Owen Seaman, and for this clever bit of sewer cleaning he should receive a pension from the ever just British Govt.[5]

But oddly enough, in the same issue there is an advertisement for Sylvia Beach's Paris publication of *Ulysses* that quotes Richard Aldington: "A most remarkable book . . . Bloom is a rags and tatters Hamlet, a proletarian Lear. . . ."

Pound, however, never completely gave up on his original Imagist; in 1929 he wrote to Harriet Monroe: "More cheering news items are that Aldington seems to have awakened from his slumbers. I may be sending you something of his, before long."[6] And in his *Literary Essays* Pound spoke with high regard for Aldington's early poetry:

> . . . Aldington's version of **"[To] Atthis,"**. . . . These have worn smooth in my head and I am not through with them, nor with Aldington's **"In Via Sistina"** nor his other poems in "Des Imagistes," though people have told me their flaws. It may be that their content is too much embedded in me for me to look back at the words.[7]

Amy Lowell, who took over from Pound the editorship of the last three Imagist anthologies, wrote a critique of Aldington's poetry in *The Little Review* in 1915. She called his poetry delicate, elusive, and suggestive; his quality was a "stark, unsentimental preoccupation with beauty." Miss Lowell characterized his poetry as consisting of intense feeling underlying astringent utterance, and called Aldington a highly civilized, sophisticated lyrist of unusual achievement and fine promise.[8]

Another fellow poet and a contributor to the second Imagist anthology, John Gould Fletcher, reviewed Aldington's first American edition, ***Images Old and New*** in April of 1916. Several years earlier Fletcher had urged Amy Lowell not to contribute to *Des Imagistes* because it was to be, he thought, simply a scheme to promote Aldington in the United States. Now his attitude had changed. Writing in *Poetry* under the title "Mr. Aldington's Images," he said, "Recently there have been in England signs of a return to that simplicity and restraint which are the qualities of highest art. . . . Of this admirable tendency Mr. Aldington is

the precursor and the most shining example."[9] In the May issue of *The Little Review* Fletcher began an article on "Three Imagist Poets" which he concluded in the June-July issue. In the first part he said of Aldington that he was a cultivated, sophisticated, bookish poet. Among Fletcher's comments on specific poems was his suggestion that nothing in all literature could be safely set beside **"Choricos."** He said that Aldington was a pessimist who could be humorous, playful, and even fantastic, but who, at bottom, was a romantic. In the second half of the article Fletcher compared Aldington and his wife and fellow poet, H. D. Aldington was a skeptic, enamored of lost Greek beauty, who wrote about life, while H. D. was a nature poet. Aldington's work raised questions about our life, while H. D.'s offered eternal answers. Fletcher thought that, except for **"Choricos,"** H. D.'s work was superior in rhythm. Aldington, he said, had many unsolved problems underlying his thought; he wrote on many themes, H. D. on only two or three. H. D.'s art was perfect within its limits, but Aldington's was more interesting because of its human imperfection.[10]

O. W. Firkins, in an article in the January 1917 issue of *The Nation,* expressed displeasure with Richard Aldington's metaphors:

> I am not sure but the palm for delicacy and indelicacy alike goes to Mr. Richard Aldington, who has grace in his luckier moments, and who, in his backslidings, can compare the moon, that "Queen and Huntress, chaste and fair," whom even the coarseness of the Elizabethans respected, to an awkward Venus, "with a rag of gauze about her loins," or a pregnant woman "walking cautiously over the slippery heavens."[11]

In 1919 in *The Little Review,* William Carlos Williams, another of the original contributors to *Des Imagistes,* was critical of Aldington's war poems:

> I speak of the work of Aldington and D. H. Lawrence (as presented in the July issue of *Poetry*). . . . Aldington has decidedly gone backwards in these poems. . . . It is perhaps the war that has reduced them . . . they are empty nonsense having no relation to the place or time they were written in. They have no existence. . . .
>
> What is this silly invocation to love and loveliness—of Aldington's especially,—this address to doves flying over the horrid trenches? . . . I prefer Aldington to all the "men" in the world. It is not that. I am objecting to a certain work of art that it is not what it is not. . . . Poetry is not a despairing cry of defiance. . . . It is an assertion: I am here today in the midst of living hell![12]

Also in 1919 F. S. Flint, represented in *Des Imagistes,* wrote in *Coterie* "On Richard Aldington." Flint said that Aldington's work was a record of his own spiritual experiences, and that these were the experiences of a man who lived fully in his own day. In a slap at the Pound-Eliot school, Flint declared that Aldington's work was "no mere rearrangement of echoes of bygone literature, chosen by the common ear of a clique, and tuned to its common fads." Flint thought the vice of modern English poetry to be "the pretty line and the fine-sounding word." Aldington, he contended, had not been taken in by this weakness, since he was careful of the sense of his words before he looked to their beauty. Flint suggested that the theme of ***Images*** was "the spiritual contest between imagined beauty and the outer ugliness that is thrust upon you." In ***Images of Desire*** the "passion of love is exalted as the only sanction for the weariness of human existence." ***Images of War*** expressed the emotions of a civilized man suddenly transplanted into "the barbarous and crushing circumstances of modern battle." Flint felt that the development of the poet had been continuous, and named two other poets, Catullus and Horace, who had left a record of their century in their verse as Aldington had done.[13]

Harold Monro, keeper of The Poetry Bookshop and publisher of Aldington's first volume of verse, wrote *Some Contemporary Poets* in 1920. He said of Aldington:

> His poverty of adjectival qualifications is conspicuous. . . . He relies also to excess on the mere mention of colors.
>
> There is brain behind his poetry, perhaps too much brain, too much "labour to appear skillful." Intellect is the servant of poetry, but it is a dangerous servant, apt to interfere.

Monro, however, praised Aldington's war poetry: "Except Siegfried Sassoon, no 'war poet' has represented the torments of military life with such candour and so entirely without bombastic rhetoric."[14]

In his autobiography Aldington records his gratitude to May Sinclair for helping him to become a life member of the London Library.[15] This must have made a great impression on the young poet because years later in his novel *Rejected Guest,* the hero, David Norris, is refused a membership, and the author writes bitterly in the episode.[16] In May of 1921 May Sinclair wrote an extensive critique in *The English Review* on "The Poems of Richard Aldington." On the whole Miss Sinclair's article was favorable; some of her insights were extremely perceptive: "Richard Aldington is possessed by the sense of beauty, the desire of beauty, the absolute emotion, as no English poet since Shelley has been yet possessed, with the solitary exception of H. D." After pointing out that he should have been young when Sappho or Anyte of Tegea was young, she added that one half of him was not Greek, and "it brings into his poetry an element which is not Greek, a pain, a

dissatisfaction, a sadness that the purely Greek soul did not know." This was one of the reasons, she felt, that we get a sense of incompleteness from the poems of his period of transition.

> If we are to find his sources and affinities it is clear that Richard Aldington owes an immense debt to Walter Savage Landor. There is no other writer of "prose poetry" with whom he can be more fitly compared.

Miss Sinclair saw in Aldington a split personality: one half a poet of classical Greece and the other half a poet of modern times. At the time of her writing (1921) she felt that "it was the Greek Richard Aldington who ripened to a precocious mastery; the modern poet that is no less surely in him has not even approached maturity."[17]

The publication in New York in 1928 of Aldington's ***Collected Poems*** was the occasion for reminiscence and a review by Harriet Monroe. She recalled *Poetry*'s first exciting years and the young Imagist movement of which Richard Aldington had been such an important part. Remembering his poems that had been published in the second issue of *Poetry* in 1912, and writing particularly of **"Choricos,"** she said:

> 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.

Miss Monroe felt that Aldington's reaction to the war was "cynicism—bitter disbelief in life, its values and its gods." On the whole, she thought, "he has followed with fair consistency the stern principles under which he and the other imagists began their revolution nearly seventeen years ago."[18]

The ***Collected Poems*** also provided the occasion for Paull F. Baum to review Aldington's position as a poet. Baum wrote in *South Atlantic Quarterly*: "He who would have lived happily in a pastoral of Theocritus finds himself at bay among the complexities of civilization and the brutalities of war." This reviewer was one of the very few who did not praise Aldington's love poems highly. He found that their "note is forced to shrillness, sometimes, which begets doubt." Baum praised the poet's prosody, declaring that "if for no other reason, Mr. Aldington's poetry would be important for its metrical mastery." The reviewer concluded by seeing the same sort of divided self in the poet that May Sinclair had called attention to, and hoping that "Mr. Aldington will complete the story with a satisfying resolution of his Arcadian-modernistic discord."[19]

The publication in 1929 of Aldington's *Death of a Hero* catapulted him from the relative obscurity of a poet and man of letters, known in literary circles but not to the public at large, into a best-seller novelist with an international reputation. Besides adding considerably to his circle of friends and to his financial security, the novel's publication stimulated the writing of the first book devoted entirely to study of his work. In *Life for Life's Sake* Aldington tells of Thomas McGreevy's joining him at a table outside the Closerie des Lilas in Paris the September when *Death of a Hero* was brought out:

> Presently a man came up to our table and joined us. This was Tom McGreevy, an Irishman I had met once or twice at Joyce's. . . . Although, as our friend A. S. Frere once remarked, Tom McGreevy is five hundred per cent Irish, he had served as a gunner officer in the B.E.F. in France; and therefore was well disposed towards my little efforts at reviving common memories. Since he has more than his share of Irish wit and charm, and is highly literate, we spent a pleasant evening.[20]

Aldington calls McGreevy "the first and certainly one of the best beloved of the many friends made for me by *Death of a Hero.*" He describes their friendship in a reminiscence of some length, during which he says:

> He was a graduate of Trinity College and, when I first knew him, Lecteur d' Anglais at the École Normale Supérieure, the most highbrow establishment in France. . . . Though Tom spent so much of his time with sceptical young Frenchmen who riddled every prejudice and superstition with witty satire, and though he was as much a man of the world as one so pure in heart could be, he had some singular views. Thus he astounded me by declaring emphatically that the Gunpowder Plot never existed and was entirely invented by the Protestants—a piece of Jesuit propaganda long ago exploded by competent historians.[21]

Thomas McGreevy's *Richard Aldington: An Englishman* was published in London by Chatto and Windus in 1931 as Number 10 in the Dolphin Book series. The book is dedicated "For Brigit," probably meaning Brigit Patmore, who was Aldington's mistress at this time. Its epigraph is from Samuel Beckett:

> Yesterday is not a milestone that has been passed, but a daystone on the beaten track of the years, and irremediably part of us, within us, heavy and dangerous. We are not merely more weary because of yesterday, we are other, no longer what we were before the calamity of yesterday.

This little book contains only seventy-three pages. The first chapter is political in nature and deals with the war and the postwar conditions that provided the background for Aldington's first novel, which appeared, McGreevy says, because "it was time for a generation that had fought and thought and felt deeply to say its say." Chapter II discusses the Imagists: "They were aesthetes—in a safer, a more virile, way than the young men of the 'nineties, but the American

Mr. Pound did know who constituted the *avant garde* in early twentieth-century French painting and sculpture as the American Mr. Whistler had known who constituted it in the late nineteenth" (p. 10). McGreevy writes attractively of the early circle in which the young poet moved: Yeats, Pound, Marinetti. At first, he says, Aldington wrote only of what he loved: "nature which was still living and lovely, civilisation which seemed dead but was still lovely to dream over" (p. 12). He says of the young poet's metrical skill (p. 16):

> Without in the least deserting the genius of his own language, he won something of the subtle Greek harmony that is independent of any such mechanical element as rhyme. By giving no special importance to the last word of each line, by labouring over all the words more carefully, he got a natural, unmechanical grace which is absent from Swinburne, and which is one of the miracles of the Hellenic method in all the arts.

Chapter III deals with Richard Aldington's war poetry. "He went ahead, and for all he was young and only wakening from a boy's dream of poetry to fumble with a reality more dreadful than he could ever have imagined, he succeeded in turning that reality into poetry many, many times" (p. 25). In this chapter McGreevy discusses quite a number of the war poems individually. The chapter concludes with the suggestion that Aldington, despite his proximity to death for many months, finally "was for life—and for quick life, not still life" (p. 35).

The fourth chapter of *Richard Aldington: An Englishman* covers the ten postwar years during which, McGreevy says somewhat inaccurately, Aldington "gave relatively little time to poetry." McGreevy makes an interesting observation (p. 39) concerning the poet's interest in Voltaire:

> It is obvious why Richard Aldington should have been drawn to the study of Voltaire at the time. Voltaire's scepticism, his distrust of the vested interests, his humanity, and his often malicious fancy were bound to appeal to the disillusionment and sense of pity of the returned soldier.

Chapter V is devoted to *Death of a Hero.* McGreevy points out the Greek structure of the novel, indicating that this important influence on Aldington's poetry also carried over to his prose. In the final chapter of McGreevy's book the short stories are discussed and a few sentences given to *A Dream in the Luxembourg,* which McGreevy calls a "gracious wanton idyll." The Irishman speaks very highly, too, of the fourth section of Aldington's **"Passages Toward a Long Poem,"** which he saw, of course, only in the 1930 Imagist anthology and not in its later form.

As a criticism of Aldington's poetry, Thomas McGreevy's *Richard Aldington: An Englishman* has its weaknesses. A good share of this book is taken up by what Aldington called McGreevy's "singular views." We have no doubts about the author's being both Irish and Catholic, since he expresses his views on England and Protestantism quite freely. McGreevy strays far too much into a garrulous appraisal "of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—," but on the other hand he has some pertinent things to say about Aldington. His closeness to the poet and his knowledge of the milieu out of which the poet wrote make him a valuable commentator.

In the late 1920s Glenn Hughes was a professor of English at the University of Washington and editor of the University of Washington Chapbooks. Number 6 of these Chapbooks, published in 1927, was Richard Aldington's *D. H. Lawrence: An Indiscretion,* and Number 13, published the following year, his *Remy de Gourmont: A Modern Man of Letters.* Probably at Aldington's suggestion, Hughes wrote a foreword (following one by Ford Madox Ford) to the *Imagist Anthology 1930.* In this foreword, which is dated 6 July 1929, Hughes reviews the past of Imagism, discusses its impact on modern poetry, and lists those poets who might be considered to have been Imagists. Probably as the result of this first-hand contact, he wrote, and had published by Stanford University Press in 1931, *Imagism and the Imagists: A Study in Modern Poetry.* In his Preface to the book Professor Hughes says (p. vii):

> It seemed to me, when I undertook this study, that a certain advantage can be obtained by chronicling a literary movement soon after its climax, before the principal participants forget the motives and the events essential to it.

He points out also, however, that a contemporary historian is severely hampered by having to withhold certain biographical details; no literary history can be perfect, "for the contemporary historian withholds facts and the later one cannot discover them" (p. viii).

Imagism and the Imagists is divided into two parts: the four chapters of Part I deal with "Imagism," and Part II devotes a separate chapter to each of the seven Imagists who contributed to Amy Lowell's three anthologies. Chapter 5, the one concerned with Aldington, consists of twenty-four pages (pp. 85-108) under the subtitle, "The Rebel." Hughes begins with biographical material and a discussion of Aldington's early work, including his editorship of *The Egoist* and his early prose writings. There is this general characterization (p. 86):

> The essence of Aldington's character, the key to his poetry, is rebellion. He cannot tolerate the status quo. That is why he admires Pound and Lawrence and

> Wyndham Lewis, and why his god is Voltaire. The youngest of the imagists, he proved one of the staunchest defenders of the faith, a warrior eager for battle, and armed with much learning, tremendous mental energy, and a mocking, biting wit. His headstrong enthusiasms result sometimes in inconsistency and exaggeration, but generally he is a sound and penetrating thinker.

Hughes then discusses the individual volumes of poetry up to and including *A Dream in the Luxembourg* and, of course, those of Aldington's poems included in the 1930 *Imagist Anthology.* The early ***Images (1910-1915)*** is considered and some of its poems; then ***Images of War.*** Professor Hughes speculates on what would have happened to the poet if there had been no war. "It is possible that without the experience of war he would have become as bitter and cynical as he did with the experience. At any rate, his two and a half years of service, with fifteen months spent at the actual front, left him a quite different poet" (p. 93). Hughes thinks that Aldington's war poems are a recognizable continuation of his earlier work, although their tone is sterner and their details more vivid. They are "some of the truest and most beautiful poems written by any soldier in modern times."

Hughes praises the love poems of ***Images of Desire*** and quotes May Sinclair's admiration of ***Myrrhine and Konallis***; he sees ***Exile and Other Poems*** as "voicing the disillusionment and despair which besieged the poet in the post-war days." There is a careful analysis of ***A Fool i' the Forest,*** which Professor Hughes considers "Aldington's finest poetic achievement." Of ***The Eaten Heart*** he says (p. 106):

> The contemplation of this romantic story, with its tragic end, leads the modern poet to an analysis of love, to a contrast between old and new ideals, and thence to a semi-autobiographical rhapsody in which the recurrent motif is the struggle of a romantic nature to adapt itself to the hardness and disillusionment of a deflowered age, a post-war, machine-governed world.

Imagism and the Imagists and Thomas McGreevy's little volume are the only book-length works that try in any way to cope directly with Richard Aldington's poetry. Like McGreevy's, Professor Hughes's book has the disadvantage, because of its publication date, of not dealing with the last two long poems and the collected editions. And of its two hundred and forty-nine pages, only a fraction are directly concerned with Aldington's work, with the result that not much space can be devoted to the individual volumes, to say nothing of the individual poems. Nevertheless this is a seminal work on Imagism and a valuable contribution to Aldington scholarship. Unlike McGreevy's book, *Imagism and the Imagists* includes an index and an excellent bibliography of the individual poets as well as of more general books and articles about Imagism. Professor Hughes's conclusions about some of the poems, and especially his final comment that, for Aldington, "rebellion is the mainspring of his life," should be, however, accepted only with reservations.

The 1934 publication of ***The Poems of Richard Aldington,*** which included almost all of the poems of ***The Complete Poems*** except ***Life Quest*** and ***The Crystal World,*** provided another opportunity for critical review. R. P. Blackmur, writing in *The Nation* in that year, has little that is affirmative to say of the poetry of Aldington or, for that matter, any of the Imagists: "his work is not poetry of a high order. The best evidence for this statement is that his poetry loses rather than gains when read all at one time." Mr. Blackmur thinks that the failure may in part be historical:

> Mr. Aldington began publishing with the imagist groups of 1912, and that—as it has turned out for everyone in the group—was a heavy weight to bear. The excitement of a fresh, superficial view coupled with an easy, not to say laxative, method of writing produced or encouraged a good many rather fluid talents to whom the finished, the solid, the mature seemed stale. Success was accidental and fragmentary, and no poet can expect a lifetime of accidents unless the life is short.

The reviewer suggests that the heirs of Imagism "have been unable either to sustain a tone or explore a subject in terms the reader can accept." Citing Eliot and Pound as examples of poets who deliberately obstruct by obscurity, he classes Aldington with Cummings as writers who use words as they find them without much effort to particularize them in their poems. He continues:

> Perhaps nothing more orderly, especially in the realm of poetry and feeling—nothing less fragmentary, nothing less heretical—could have been expected of a generation whose young manhood was interrupted by the war and demolished by the peace, and whose imagination was thus driven by the need of exile or escape from the dreadful order that was laid everywhere upon it.

Blackmur concludes that while Aldington often creates powerful personal documents of life, he does not often do the necessary work to make them powerful poetry. "The success of many fragments only adumbrates the size of the failure." Along with Aldington, Blackmur attacks other modern poets and what amounts to the whole of modern poetry that has grown out of Imagism.[22] Time has proved him wrong in the instances of poets such as Lawrence and Williams; it may also do so in the case of Aldington.

John Wheelwright also contributed a critical review of the 1934 collection under the title "A Poet of Three Persons." The point that Mr. Wheelwright makes is

that the first half of the poems show Aldington as a leader of the group which rescued Anglo-American poetry from its slump at the turn of the century, while the next quarter show his work in a post-war decline, and the last quarter how it has "come back to mastery of the direct and elegant record of sensation and opinion."

> Slowly awakened to intellect, sympathetically richer than Pound or Eliot, Aldington has always written as good verse as they have dug out of themselves rather than out of other poets. Less rich than D. H. Lawrence though prosodically neater, strong in the struggle against whimsy to be honest, weakened by "Stoic" loyalty to the things that make him sad, Aldington and the British strain he exemplifies widen in prosodic resources and become more didactic while British culture ever grows more somber.[23]

Frank Swinnerton in *The Georgian Scene: A Literary Panorama,* published in the same year as Blackmur's and Wheelwright's articles, devotes five pages to Richard Aldington. He is, however, mostly concerned with him as a novelist—and even there the criticism is too much concerned with the individual rather than with his work. Swinnerton mentions the poems only in passing: "As these scenes show [in the novels], and as his poems and such passages in other novels as slip past his earnest jocularity show, he has great capacity for emotion."[24]

In a 1938 review of ***The Crystal World,*** Kerker Quinn precedes his discussion with some general criticism. He begins by speaking of the fierce competition for a place in the first line of minor poets in an age when major poets are rare, and he finds some, like Richard Aldington, buried deep in the ranks through unhappy circumstances. Quinn feels that Aldington's prime misfortune was his association with Imagism: "the movement was temporarily beneficial to him, and he casually forsook it when it ceased being so. Yet when Imagism slipped its moorings and drifted far from popular favor, most of us overlooked that he wasn't still aboard." He also thinks that Aldington's link with the British war poets told against him, though he admits that Aldington, in company with Wilfred Owen and Herbert Read, wrote the most powerful verse occasioned by the war.

In the middle twenties, Quinn says, Aldington did not receive the praise he deserved because he did not "obey the Eliotic canon which decreed that poetic emotion be de-personalized." In 1928 and again in 1934 his collections were damned by the critics because they lacked the technical finish of Eliot. "No one honored his apparent conviction that formal control is less essential to poetry than the spurt and flare of imagination." Quinn says Aldington needs to be judged along with such impulsive poets as Lawrence, Emerson, and Shelley, "whose success is intermittent, but who can be read with as much pleasure as the more disciplined, uniform poets." He concludes:

> Nearly as common is the charge that Aldington has relied on too few themes and rehearsed them too ploddingly. True enough, he has dealt almost exclusively with the radiance of immediate love and of love in the memory, with the hideousness of immediate battle and of battle in the memory, and with the suppression suffered by imagination at the hands of materialistic civilization. But at least he has searched them deeply, sometimes in unforgettable language; furthermore, his approach to them and his tone have been remarkably varied.[25]

Sometime not long after 1938 (which is the date of the latest of Aldington's works that it lists) an undated booklet, *Richard Aldington: An Appreciation,* by C. P. Snow was published in London by William Heinemann as an introduction to a planned "Uniform Edition" of Aldington's writings. At the end there is "A list of the Works of Richard Aldington." A good deal of the contents of this undated booklet are reprinted in *Richard Aldington: An Intimate Portrait,* which is discussed later in this chapter. The criticism covers all of Aldington's work; not very much space is devoted to the poetry.

Snow emphasizes the fact that Aldington's writing is full of life, and mentions particularly *All Men Are Enemies,* the ***Collected Poems*** (1929), and ***A Dream in the Luxembourg*** as illustrations.

> The romantic ideal and its negative; the "finer fuller life" and its absence through human stupidity; the delight and purity of acceptance, and the bitterness at ugly-minded and hostile men; this is much of Aldington, but there is a great deal more.

Snow suggests that there is "a kind of Sancho Panza matter-of-factness, which is combined in his case with mental integrity and passion for the truth." Snow also feels that the publication of ***The Crystal World*** convinced many of what they had been suspecting for some time: "that Aldington has written some of the best love-poetry in English." This booklet was written as "an appreciation" to help promote an edition that Heinemann planned, but it would not have been necessary for Snow to have added to his comment on the love poems, if he did not wish to do so, this last sentence: "Most of us are not over-willing to commit ourselves to a literary judgment on a contemporary; but that statement I would make myself without feeling that I was risking anything at all."

In 1949 Alister Kershaw prepared *A Bibliography of the Works of Richard Aldington from 1915 to 1948.*[26] Although this does not include any works published

between 1948 and Aldington's death in 1962, it provides an excellent basis for the study of the more than two hundred items credited to him. Aldington himself wrote an introduction for the book in which he noted that the only other attempts at a bibliography were the list prepared by C. P. Snow and an incomplete one attached to a German dissertation. He discussed the question of anthologies and the decision to omit all of them from Kershaw's work, even the Imagist anthologies which are listed in D. H. Lawrence's bibliography. Aldington pointed to the hopelessness of the task of the bibliographer of the living author, and mentioned a foreign edition which had arrived by post the day Kershaw mailed off his manuscript to the publishers. Kershaw wrote a short Preface in which he said:

> But Richard Aldington (along with Lawrence) is one of the two or three authors of our time who is to be *read*, really read, and that means, for anyone who cares at all about the written word, collected—his every publication collected.

In 1951 the University of Oklahoma Press published *Imagism: A Chapter for the History of Modern Poetry* by Stanley K. Coffman, Jr. As its title indicates, this is primarily a history of the Imagist movement, and a good one, which in its two hundred and twenty-five pages is able to go into greater depth than Glenn Hughes's book. Dr. Coffman does not include studies of the individual poets. Of the forty-five separate references to Richard Aldington (only Hulme and Pound are mentioned more often), many are historical rather than related to criticism of Aldington's poetry; nevertheless, this analysis is valuable to a study of the poet.

Coffman notes that Aldington was very effective in advancing the cause of Imagism in England because of his position on *The Egoist*, and that he was one of the three poets (the others were H. D. and Flint) who continued their allegiance to the movement from 1912 to 1917. Coffman also gives credit to Aldington for the critical comment that most clearly defines Imagism. Of his poetry Coffman says (p. 165):

> Aldington also shared Pound's admiration for the quality of "hardness" in poetry; the second of the principles he listed in "Modern Poetry and the Imagists" demanded of a poem a "hardness, as of cut stone. No slop, no sentimentality." His poems show a feeling for the beauty of natural objects, the human body, or physical passions, which he found best expressed through the art and mythology of classical Greece.

Coffman says further that Aldington did not confine his attention entirely to classical objects, "but when he turned to contemporary scenes he could not always adequately objectify in his attitude toward them."[27]

Much of Aldington's prose work, particularly his novels, has enjoyed an international reputation. Novels, short stories, and some poetry have been translated into Russian. In 1956 Mikhail Urnov wrote in the Russian English-language periodical, *News*, on "Richard Aldington and His Books." He began with a short summary of Imagism and a few words on the war poems. Most of his space was devoted to *Death of a Hero*. ***The Crystal World,*** *Very Heaven,* and *Life for Life's Sake* were seen as withdrawals, and Urnov urged Aldington's return to the people:

> During World War I Aldington was plunged into the thick of events and rubbed shoulders with the common man. This contact did not, however, prove enduring, and this told fatally on the creative evolution of the author of "Death of a Hero."[28]

Writing in 1965, Sir William Haley, editor of the London *Times*, said:

> In 1957 I felt detraction of Aldington was becoming so undiscriminating that his real achievements were being forgotten. I wrote an article to put what he had done into perspective. He was touched, and thanked me for "standing by an unpopular writer, who has some claims to being considered England's literary public enemy number one. It would be a kingly title but for the fact that it practically abolishes income."[29]

The article referred to was published in the *Times* under Haley's pseudonym, Oliver Edwards. It appeared in his column "Talking of Books" under the title "Richard Yea and Nay," and concluded:

> He has a firm place among the writers of the interwar years. His message was less striking and less dynamic than D. H. Lawrence's but it was healthier. He pioneered the work of other writers, both English and French, as a generous and perceptive critic. He has two novels (*Death of a Hero* and *All Men Are Enemies*), two books of poems (***A Dream in the Luxembourg*** and ***Life Quest***), and two biographies (*Voltaire* and *Portrait of a Genius, But—*) that will stand. It is to them we must look if we wish to get Aldington's true measure.[30]

On 18 January 1957, Aldington wrote to Henry Rago, then editor of *Poetry*:

> I venture to send you a note on my books from the London Times, written by the editor (Sir William Haley). Well, he makes many reservations and lets me down over the Colonel Lawrence business, but I'd rather have that than silence![31]

Richard Aldington died in the south of France in July of 1962. In 1965 Dr. Miriam J. Benkovitz edited a group of his letters under the title "Nine for Reeves: Letters from Richard Aldington." (The title is an allusion to Aldington's 1938 novel, *Seven Against Reeves.*) These nine letters were written by Aldington during the early 1930s to James Reeves, a young admirer then an undergraduate at Jesus College, Cambridge