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Bryher's Letters to Amy Lowell; or, How to Desire America, Build the Poet, and Promote Transatlantic Literary Relationships

> You have said something here which deserves to become an epigram: "It is difficult to imitate a hundred authors; so easily to be influenced by them."
> (Amy Lowell to Bryher, 1919)

Bryher and Amy Lowell corresponded from 1917 until the latter's untimely death in 1925: a relatively short time span but long enough to reconstruct the storyline of their relationship.[1] Within the short space of this essay I will concentrate on the inception and key moments of their exchange, from Bryher's first letter to Lowell in 1917 in the context of World War I to, at the end, their meeting in New York in 1920, during Bryher's first momentous visit to the United States. From even this limited evaluation of their correspondence, however, we can see how their epistolary relationship soon evolves into personal friendship and then into reciprocal critical and literary support. During these four years, we observe Bryher gaining a sense of self and worth thanks to Lowell, and Lowell earning some standing and recognition in a literary world still heavily dominated by British literary hegemony. We also perceive the struggle of both women as they strive to succeed as writers in a male-dominated Euro-American culture.

It is within and through this personal story, where the agency of the two correspondents comes to the fore, that the process of indigenization or domestication of aesthetic and cultural forms becomes ever more evident. For, indeed, when we move from a personal to a cultural perspective, Bryher's and Lowell's letters also tell the story of the hybridization resulting from literary importation, assimilation and re-exportation, in a never-ending cultural circuit.[2]

Writing from Brookline, Lowell comments on her translations and adaptations of French, British and Oriental forms, revealing how important they were for her own poems and poetics. The reasons she offers her correspondent also reveal her desire to build an American Renaissance in poetry and

thus become a protagonist on the American cultural scene. Bryher, on the British side of the Atlantic, emerges as the spokesperson for a developing European awareness of the USA as a source of culture and as the "modern" country *par excellence*, testifying also to the literary transformations that were making American poets the leaders in modern poetry in English—a poetry that, ironically, had been launched in London by American expatriates who admired classic Greek, Hebrew, Chinese and European medieval literatures and renewed poetry in English by translating and indigenizing late nineteenth-century French forms and themes.

1. *Amy Lowell and Bryher*

No poem better than Amy Lowell's "Astigmatism" (Lowell 1914, 45) anticipates the selective, oppositional and finally mortifying attitude that underpinned the canon of Anglo-American modernism for most of the twentieth century, with its active diminution, if not complete exclusion, of some of its key actors, Lowell one of them.[3] A new crop of critical essays has in the past few years redirected the attention of scholars and the reading public to her literary production. Two recent anthologies of her poems and reprints of some of her books corroborate this renewed interest and anticipate a more extensive reconsideration of the role she played in the formation of Modernism.[4] In the past, however, literary histories have tended to dismiss her poetry and highlighted her entrepreneurial spirit instead. She has come down to us as the strong-willed Boston Brahmin who, having read H.D.'s poems in Harriet Monroe's *Poetry* magazine, realized her own verses were also *imagistes* and went to London to storm and join the *Imagiste* movement. For all that she did, however, she was never fully accepted as a poet by Pound's supporters and by later critics. As a result, the typical image of her that remains in the mind is that of the powerful, rich "hippopoetess" who snatched the Imagist movement out of Pound's hands and then returned to America to promote the Imagists, contemporary American poetry and, of course, her own work.[5] Yet, her correspondence with Bryher reveals a generous poet, willing to share her knowledge and help a younger aspiring writer.

As for Bryher, most critics have taken at face value what she wrote in her autobiographical *The Heart to Artemis* about how she discovered H.D.'s *Sea Garden* (1916) and how important the American woman's poems had been to her life and growth as a writer. Though she also stated that she had "discovered from Amy Lowell's *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry* that H.D. was a woman and an American," (Bryher 1962, 182) she underplayed Lowell's role in her discovery of H.D. and the Imagists. Her early letters to Lowell tell a different story, one that highlights Bryher's later distortion of historical fact,

functional to her design to build the myth of H.D.'s centrality in her life. It was in fact Amy Lowell who first directed Brhyer's attention to the Imagists and it was Lowell's introduction to H.D.'s poetry in *Tendencies* that led her to the discovery of *Sea Garden*. But because perhaps very few have read, or heard, of her, some information is needed to help us understand her early fascination with Lowell and her poetry.

Born Annie Winifred Ellerman in 1894, she was the daughter of the richest man in Great Britain, the shipping tycoon, industrialist and financier Sir John Reeves Ellerman who, among other things, owned shares in the *The Times*, *Daily Mail*, *Tatler* and *The Sphere* (Taylor 1976, 79). As the daughter of a rich man, brought up in a "solid, Protestant" family, "less extravagant than thrifty" (Bryher 1962, 29), in a Victorian and then Edwardian society, she suffered the limitations and powerlessness of the women of her time, enhanced by her own family's loving but stern repression and forced isolation. She was prevented from pursuing a career as an archaeologist, or any other profession that would have taken her away from home. This marked her for life. For Annie loved adventure and travel, and the freedom she felt only boys were allowed to enjoy. "The modern world does not understand how narrow experience was for the Edwardian woman," she wrote in her autobiography (Bryher 1962, 144).

Mostly known for her lifelong relationship with Hilda Doolittle, Bryher also contracted two unconventional marriages: in 1920 with the American poet-editor Robert McAlmon and, in 1927, with the Scottish artist and film director Kenneth Macpherson. McAlmon, who thought that Paris was the only place where he could seriously write, introduced her to the Paris of the roaring twenties. Although Bryher did not take to the life of the artists' milieu, in Paris she did meet American expatriate writers like Gertrude Stein, who later contributed to the magazines she edited, and other key figures like Adrienne Monnier and Sylvia Beach, with whom she struck a lifelong friendship and whom she regularly visited for the rest of her life. Her second husband was instrumental in her involvement with German *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Russian experimental cinema, and Berlin. Between 1927 and 1932 in Berlin she established a solid friendship with Austrian film director Georg W. Pabst, who opened for her the Berlin cinema world. Through Pabst, she also met her psychoanalyst, Hanns Sachs, who, in turn, introduced her to the Freudian school of psychoanalysis in the German metropolis. From 1932 onwards, she was totally absorbed by the approaching cataclysm in Europe and relief work and assistance to refugees from Nazism between 1933 and 1939.[6]

Bryher has left us two of the most interesting modernist autobiographies, *The Heart to Artemis* (1962) and *The Days of Mars* (1972). In *The Heart to Artemis*, recently reprinted, she portrays herself as a participant in and

an agent of modern innovation. For the scholar as well as for the lay reader interested in modernist history and culture, this autobiography is as relevant as Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Reading it, we become acquainted with a woman who is naturally attracted to modern life, taking easily, almost instinctively, to new means of transportation like the airplane, to new technological tools like camera and film, to the new arts and music. For a woman, she claims, to be modern is to rebel openly against Victorian and Edwardian mores and morality. It is also nothing less than to recover one's separate individuality, to pursue personal development, and to act according to one's wishes and talents, rather than adhere to social dictates. Individualism, in synthesis, is for her the necessary answer to the Victorian massification that froze men and women within fixed gender roles and blind obedience to tradition, no matter which class they belonged to. With a telling image, she represents her generation as "mass-produced little Victorias and Alberts already sitting on our memorials" (Bryher 1962, 161).

Late in life Bryher authored a number of historical novels, one of which, *Visa for Avalon*, a science fiction novel, was reprinted in 2005. But in her youth, between the late nineteen-twenties and early forties, she contributed to contemporary culture through critical essays on subjects ranging from Russian cinema to Elizabethan drama, and, most of all, through the two magazines she financed and co-edited: *Close Up* (1927-1933) and *Life and Letters To-Day*, bought in 1935. *Close Up* claimed to be the first magazine of cinema as art in the English-speaking world, but it also devoted space to discussing the relevance of cinema for mass education. Dorothy Richardson contributed a regular column on this aspect. As for *Life and Letters To-Day*, though her name did not appear on the masthead, Bryher was the real editor, and the one who "liaised" with contributors from all over the world. Through this journal she tried to build a transnational Europe of the arts, capable of countering Nazi and Fascist nationalisms and establishing a fruitful dialogue with the cultures of countries such as America, China and Africa.

There is another literary activity for which Bryher was renowned: her letter writing. Bryher's huge correspondence, particularly the letters she exchanged with American writers and artists, is integral to the network of material and intellectual exchanges that fostered a highly hybrid modernist Euro-American culture. Of her Sylvia Beach wrote in *Shakespeare & Company*:

> Bryher, though she won't like my mentioning it, has done more than anyone to maintain international contacts throughout wars, and to keep together her large family of intellectuals, who are dispersed in many countries. She has looked after them in war and peace, and her correspondence is vast. (Beach 1991, 103)

Directly and indirectly, Bryher played a very important role in connecting Europe and America, in shaping Anglo-American modernist culture and pro-

moting some of its avant-garde figures and publications. "I have spent a lot of my life trying to bring Americans and English together" she writes in *The Heart to Artemis* (Bryher 1962, 154-155).

For all her desire to establish literary relationships, Bryher's attempts at connecting were never separated from her search for, and active building of, a writerly, modern, ethical and political self. Given her isolation, from childhood Bryher had sought, and found, in books what the closed space of home, family and society could not provide. And as a young aspiring writer at the beginning of her career, books were just about the only source to which she could turn to learn her *métier*. Her correspondence often started as a personal response to the authors whose books she had found appealing and not unusually ended up in further exchanges and literary apprenticeships when not also in her patronage. During her long life (1894-1983) she corresponded and built long-lasting friendships with a great number of American writers and poets, among these Marianne More, Horace Gregory, Maria Zaturenska and Muriel Rukeyser. Nevertheless, Amy Lowell was her first "American" correspondent, one whose figure loomed large in Bryher's imagination for many years. She was as much captivated by Lowell's outspoken Americanness as she was conquered by her "modern" poetry and non-academic criticism. Though later H.D. would take Lowell's place, Bryher not only admired the latter for her work but, feeling a personal and experiential affinity, identified deeply with her and, at the beginning of her writing career, adopted her as a model.

2. *Bryher, Lowell, French Symbolist Poetry and World War I*

On September 14, 1917 Bryher sent from London to Amy Lowell in Brookline a five-page handwritten letter that began "*Six French Poets* is the primary reason for this letter." She was 23 years old and World War I was raging in Europe. Since 1914 German zeppelins had been raiding the skies over London, where she lived, and which she considered "a city of the dead." She herself felt "neither dead nor alive," with her life more confined than ever by her family's further tightening of an already stern discipline (Bryher 1962, 194, 198). Yet, by 1917 war had started to affect changes in her life as in the lives of the many women called to substitute for men in every workplace. "We were freed by the war," Bryher would state (Bryher 1962, 146). She aspired to become a "modern" poet, and in 1914 had already privately printed a very immature collection, *Region of Lutany and Other Poems*, whose cold reception had made her even more aware that in order to write good poetry, technique was as necessary as experience—as were exchanges with other writers, if not a *cénacle*. Yet she had no direct connection with London's modernist milieu. Clement Shorter, editor of *The Sphere* and *Tatler*,

two of the London papers partly owned by her father, was her only literary acquaintance and mentor, and he was rather conservative. He grounded her well in Elizabethan literature but cared little for contemporary writing. Thus, during the war years and completely singlehandedly, she had begun to develop and cultivate her interest in modern poetry, particularly in the French symbolists and in American verse, and secretly dreamed of going to America, for her the land where girls could work, where freedom was real. "America was my first love affair and I have never gotten over it," Bryher unabashedly stated in *The Heart to Artemis* (Bryher 1962, 155). Around 1916, due to a shortage of male staff, she had also started to write reviews for the *Saturday Review*, to whose editor, A.A. Bauman, she had been introduced by Clement Shorter. Her first review was of a book by Verhaeren. And it is probably in this context of heightened attention to French Symbolist poetry and new self-confidence as a reviewer that Bryher found the nerve to write to Lowell.

Even if America had not yet entered the European War, the conflict had played, and continued to play, no small role in Bryher's mature American correspondent's life and work. In fact, from its inception, Lowell had found herself involved, and in more ways than one. She was in London on August 14, 1914 when Great Britain declared war on Germany and, like Robert Frost and Gertrude Stein, found herself stranded in the capital. She had gone to London early in June to meet again with Ezra Pound and the other Imagists and to celebrate the publication of *Des Imagistes*, which included her poem "In the Garden." She was also hoping to secure publication of her forthcoming volume of poetry, *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* (1914) in Great Britain. She had had no luck with Pound, who had already launched the Vorticist movement and was not interested in a more democratic editorial management of Imagist literary production. Their clamorous break also caused a split among the Imagists, with H.D. and Richard Aldington siding with Lowell and helping her publish three more Imagist anthologies in the United States: *Some Imagist Poets* 1915, 1917, 1918.

If Lowell was able to turn a failure into gain with the Imagists, she was not equally fortunate with her own book, for the war prevented its publication in England. Still, she went back to Brookline with a little treasure: a pile of French books and a deeper and wider understanding of Symbolist and contemporary French poets, whose work she had begun studying in earnest in preparation for a series of lectures to be delivered the following winter in Boston. During that August in London she met often with the Imagist poet Frank S. Flint, and spent more than one evening listening to his expositions of French contemporary poets, to his reading aloud Paul Fort and Henri de Régnier (Flint 1916, 9-10, Damon 1935, 246-247.) He was quite possibly *the* major authority on contemporary French poetry, and the one who had done much to stimulate the

interest of British and American poets and of the literary magazines through a number of critical writings. He authored the seminal essay published in the August 1912 issue of *The Poetry Review* entitled "Contemporary French Poetry," where he connected poetic innovation and political change, listed the new French "schools"—including Neo-Mallarmisme, Unanimisme, Futurisme, Impulsionisme, Les Paroxystes and Les Fantasistes—and quoted extensively from *vers libre* poems.[7] It was probably her exchange with Flint that made Lowell even more aware of their value for modern poetry in English as well as for contemporary culture. Through Richard Aldington she also got to know Remy de Gourmont and felt greatly indebted to him and his theories. Once returned to Boston, while putting together her first Imagist Anthology, she lectured on Émile Verhaeren, Albert Salmain, Remy de Gourmont, Henri de Régnier, Francis Jammes and Paul Fort, introducing them to the American public. Her lectures, accompanied by her own translations of representative poems, were then collected and published as *Six French Poets* in 1915.

In her book Lowell took advantage of the renewed and widespread American interest in Europe spurned by the War, and of a particular attention to France brought about by that country's heroic response to Germany's attack. Her preface to the volume is quite explicit about this. Her aim as a critic, she writes, is to disseminate among her English-speaking contemporaries the best of what the French generation of poets "immediately following that of Verlaine and Mallarmé" (Lowell 1915, vi) had contributed to modern poetry. Underlying her statement was the assumption that the break in time and the breach with the past brought about by war not only made Symbolist poetry testimony to a vanished era, but also bred new literary life out of destruction.

The purpose of her book, she tells her readers, is to highlight the things that could be rescued from that French past to build modern literature which, she believes, will be dominantly English. Having revolted against their Romantic and Realist predecessors to search for forms more suited to modern life, she maintains, the Symbolists had taught revolt to modern poets, freed poetic forms from set conventions and, finally, made them available to individual creativity. Now these forms could undergo further change as they were imported into the new century and the English-speaking culture and literatures.

In the essays that follow, Lowell also gives voice to her own perceptions of nationality, race and culture, highlighting the differences and similarities between the Anglo-Saxon Protestant world of English poetry and the Catholic, Latin world of French poetry. She draws her readers' attention to the French poets who are most suited for importation and assimilation, either because they were themselves influenced by English literature, or on the basis of personal and cultural characteristics. In her criticism she adopts the perspective of a

poet deeply aware of her Anglo-Saxon origins and completely identified with the wider English cultural, religious and literary traditions, and thus with the English-speaking continuum on both sides of the Atlantic.

3. *Transatlantic Circulation*

No surprise, then, that Bryher in her first letter to Amy Lowell writes that *Six French Poets* had fired her enthusiasm for the French Parnassian and post-Symbolist poets and that, thanks to the American poet-critic's mediation, she had come to understand the modernity of *vers libre*. She admits that at the moment she lacks inspiration and, most of all, the emotions out of which poetry is born, but Lowell has certainly convinced her that by learning the technique she can work toward her future as a writer. Furthermore, and with great insight, Bryher tells Lowell that the book has also revealed the poet-critic herself:

> It is a poet's book. Mediocrity of mere criticism may produce a biographical study, a valuable suggestion, but they could never paint six portraits in a prose Elizabethan in its vitality, redolent of real knowledge (not the arid stuff delighting certain scholars). Six portraits, or rather seven, for as I have ever held, a poet cannot prevent something of his own spirit escaping into what is written of another, so from a line here, an opinion there, I discern a seventh portrait of yourself. . . . To me *Six French Poets* was like having a friend. (Bryher, Letter of September 14, 1917, 1-2)

Though she reads French fluently and has already read de Régnier and other French contemporary poets (in her third letter she also states she had read Flint's essay), Bryher confesses that she had got very little out of everything she had read so far, thus acknowledging Lowell's role as cultural mediator.

It is because she had managed to translate the six French poets into the language of her American readers that Lowell was also able to reach the British reader that was Bryher. This fact provides evidence that a new trend had begun, and that an American could acquire a reputation in England by conquering America first. It is, then, Lowell's personal enthusiasm, her feelings, images and interpretations that, having caught Bryher's attention, opened the way for Bryher to understand the personal freedom engrafted in French *vers libre*. Lowell had used a language that spoke to the "common reader" as well as to the aspiring poet that Bryher was, and had put writer and reader on the same level. This critical attitude made Bryher feel she had not merely found information and learning, but also a friend.

Accurately read by Bryher as cultural translations of French authors, themes and forms for an English-speaking public, Lowell's essays would open the path to future transplant and indigenization. Lowell herself had already started the indigenization process. In the preface to her own *Sword Blades and Poppy*

Seed after acknowledging the influence of French "metrical experiments"on her poetry, she had proceeded to indigenize *vers libre* by calling it "unrhymed cadence":

> Many of the 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 . . . . 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. (Lowell 1914, x-xi)

Later, in her preface to *Can Grande's Castle* (1918), while acknowledging her debt to Paul Fort's original combination of prose, rhythmic prose and verse, she would define her analogous experiment as "polyphonic prose" (Lowell 1918, x-xi).

There is one more debt, however, that Lowell never acknowledged. Her essays were themselves an adaptation of the portraits of French authors which her favourite poet-critic, Remy de Gourmont, had painted in his *Livre des Masques*. Moreover, she had applied to her own book of essays—and Bryher had promptly detected it—his idea that "l'oeuvre d'un écrivain doit être non seulement le reflet, mais le reflet grossi de sa personnalité" (13).

The truth that was most revealing to Bryher in Lowell's book was that those six French poets had, in various ways, incorporated in their verse their own experience of life and freed it from past forms and past trappings. It is this modern world that becomes synonymous with *vers libre*, Bryher writes to Lowell, and confesses that the word *libre* itself works wonders in her imagination, uniting poetry, modernity and America. And in fact to her it meant the liberation of one's inner drives, desires and powers, exploration of new territories, expansion of a formerly congealed self, a movement in time that could melt the Victorian hold over a woman's destiny as much as over the twentieth century.

4. *A Spiritual Sisterhood*

But it is first and foremost as a poet and mentor that Bryher needed Lowell, and in her letter asks Lowell to become her guide, the Virgil who will introduce her to modern poetry and contemporary poetic techniques.

Six French Poets had only been the starting point of Bryher's exploration of the new *vers libre* experimentation. After reading it, she writes to her correspondent, she read everything she could get her hands on, including the two collections of poems by Lowell that she could buy in England: *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* and *Men Women and Ghosts* (1916). Of these, flatteringly, Bryher writes

> [B]eside the work of practically all contemporary English writers your poems are so rich in colour and feeling, they flame with life. I admire your experiments in new forms, yet each line you have written has the strength born of careful study behind it. (Bryher, Letter of September 14, 1917, 4)

Lowell's poems had struck a deep cord in Bryher, who detected in them the woman behind the poet and, as a consequence, could identify with her and feel that the American woman's poetry responded emotionally to situations resembling her own (Bryher 1963, 179).

Bryher's first letter, then, having begun as the gesture of the admiring reader who recognizes the literary and cultural value of the critic, very soon moves to a more personal level, candidly acknowledging an analogy of life situations and childhood experiences that creates an affinity between them. Commenting on the poems she has read she writes, "'An Aquarium' reminds me of being taken to watch the fish, when I was a small infant at Naples. You, also, have loved childhood I think, from your books" (3). And then, mentioning Lowell's confession that isolation was one of the sources of her poetry, she continues, "I have really no friend to argue with, or with whom I can discuss my own work, or discoveries. The only thing left is knowledge. Perhaps you know something of this, or why did you write 'Miscast,' my favourite of your poems." Bryher's letter claims a spiritual sisterhood. In Lowell's poems she has found expressed emotions and experiences that were and had been her own. Most of all, she recognizes her own solitude in the utter solitude present in many of Lowell's poems. Apprehending in them the author's true self, she identifies with that self.

Bryher had not yet read Lowell's first collection of poems, *A Dome of Many-Colored Glass* (1912), that recorded the exclusion of one shut out from humanity, but the sense of exclusion and isolation was very much part of the two collections she did read. In the twin poems entitled "Miscast" the brain "whetted . . . until it is like a Damascus blade" "has no use to me," "I, who am set to crack stones / in a country lane!" (Lowell 1914, 89). She could recognize that feeling, for she had often experienced it. Thus, responding to Lowell's lines, in her letter she writes of herself: "The only thing left is knowledge" (Bryher, Letter of September 14, 1917, 4).

Even before writing her first letter, then, Lowell has become a figure of identity for Bryher. And it is this deep personal identification that prompts

her move into more personal ground. She introduces herself, recapitulating her life in a synthetic history that divides it in two, with the traumatic school years and adolescent unhappiness and isolation as the mid-point, the gap in time. That story summarizes the first three chapters of the autobiographical novel she is writing at the moment, *Development*, which she offers to send Lowell to read. Finally, she reveals to her correspondent that she sees "colour in words," possibly to qualify herself as a potential imagist.

Ending her letter with a request for more information about other contemporary French and American poets, tying art and life, she declares herself ready to become Lowell's disciple and friend, thus taking the necessary steps to elicit the American poet's response.

5. *Lowell and the New American Poetry*

Lowell's response was not long in coming. The letter itself, dated November 14, 1917, is taken by Bryher as a gesture of acceptance and recognition, an assurance of her value, more so because it contains Lowell's offer to give her "any advice in [her] power," which is also the promise for the future development of their correspondence. Yes, she has also been lonely and has suffered isolation in the literary world for years, Lowell answers, but has refused to give in to the sentiment of marginality and inner silence. Offering Bryher encouraging advice, she assures her that "high courage and the constant pursuit of your own ideal will bring you to the goal of desire" (Lowell, Letter of November 4, 1917, 3).

Lowell provides a new list of younger French post-Symbolist poets and critics like Ghéon; she mentions Apollinaire as the author of a "futurist book," and strongly suggests that Bryher read Imagist poets F.S. Flint, Richard Aldington and H.D. Along with her letter she sends her most recent book of criticism, *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*, published that year as a companion volume to *Six French Poets*. It deals with the six American poets she believes are leading American letters into modernity: E.A. Robinson, R. Frost, E. Lee Masters, C. Sandburg, J. Gould Fletcher and H.D., each exemplifying a trend in contemporary American poetry. And while she believes the younger French poets, with the exception of Jules Romains, are not as interesting as those of the older generation, "[w]ith American poets the matter is quite otherwise. I am more than ever convinced that the great step forward in poetry to-day is being taken in America" (Lowell, Letter of November 4, 1917, 2).

This statement summarizes what she has articulately expounded in her preface to *Tendencies* which, as she points out, is yet another result of the ongoing European war. For the war has "produced a more poignant sense of nationality," and submerged all "hyphens . . . in the solid overprinting of the word 'America'" (Lowell 1916, v). This "realization of ourselves," she writes,

has not merely made Americans more sympathetic to their allies, it has given rise to a new sense of self and worth, of the aesthetic importance of American reality, and finally even of the historical processes and the place America will hold in them:

> Each country approaches an evolutionary step from its own racial angle, and they move alternately, first one leads and then another, but all together, if we look back a century or so, move the world forward into a new path. At the moment of writing, it is America who has taken the last, most advanced step. (Lowell 1916, vi)

With *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*, Lowell's critical perspective has taken a new turn. While in *Six French Poets* she had considered herself part of the Anglo-Saxon continuum uniting America and Great Britain, in *Tendencies* she emphasizes her Americanness and the specificity of American geography and the American experience which have produced a national, modern poetry, radically different from the British poetry that had been its inheritance and on which it had depended:

> How should such a race express itself by the sentiments appropriate to a highly civilized country no bigger than New York State, and of that country some fifty years earlier, to boot?
>
> I would not be construed into saying that the larger the country, the more profound the emotions. That would be absurd. I only mean that the material conditions under which Americans lived—the great unoccupied spaces, the constant warring and overcoming of nature, the fluid state of the social fabric—all made a different speech necessary, if they were really to express the thoughts that were in them. (Lowell 1916, 7)

Rooting herself firmly in American ground and culture, following in the steps of Emerson and Whitman, invested with an analogous sense of cultural patriotism, Lowell highlighted both the *Americanness* and the modernity of twentieth-century American poetry, a modernity based in a fluid society. This fluidity, Lowell—staunch representative of white New England hegemonic culture—wrote, was due to the fact that American society was multiethnic, multilingual and highly mobile.

6. *Adventures in El Dorado*

The immediate result of Lowell's first letter to Bryher, and of her book, was that Bryher bought the Imagist books and started to dream about America. America is her El Dorado, she replies on December 9, 1917, just as the London of the Imagists had been Lowell's El Dorado in 1914. "I feel more and more the great new movement is taking place there. I lie and dream each night of America." The three letters she writes Lowell between December, 1917 and January, 1918 report Bryher's reading of and response to both *Des Imagistes* and *Some Imagist Poets*, and to Aldington's and Lowell's poems

in them, as well as to H.D.'s *Sea Garden*. They also record the difficulty she has buying American books in England, and the restrictions war has imposed on the transatlantic book market. Most of all, these letters illustrate how Lowell's and Imagist poetry are influencing her own writing of *Development*. Of her work-in-progress she writes, "It is an attempt to deal with the early development, the literary influences, and their effect on the mind of a writer . . . I am now struggling with a fourth part in which I hope to indicate a little the widening influence of your poetry" (Bryher, Letter of December 9, 1917).

By 1920 when the book is finally published, the feelings of solidarity between the two correspondents have evolved into reciprocal literary and critical support, so much so that the American edition of *Development* is prefaced by Lowell's promotional introduction in which, though admitting that "the wide ranges of creative imagination are denied" its author (Bryher, Macmillan 1920, 12), she definitely concedes that the book is to be read as an outcome of the imagist poetic credo.

Not content with confirming Lowell's influence in her own writing, and considering *Tendencies* "one of the finest pieces of modern prose" she has read, Bryher tells Lowell that she is ready to do her best to promote her work and American contemporary poetry in England. Finally, Bryher's enthusiasm for Lowell's poetry is such that she decides to write a book-length critical essay of her own to compensate for the unsympathetic critical reception of the American poet's books in England. She deems the poet's gift of "a new world" so precious that only another gift on her part can express her debt. *The Art of Amy Lowell: A Critical Appreciation*, published in May 1918, is totally devoted to Lowell's poetry, from *Dome of Many-Colored Glass* through her last-printed composition, "Guns as Keys; and the Great Gate Swings" of 1917, to the poems in "Lacquer Prints," later to be published in *Pictures of the Floating World* (1919). Naïve and exceedingly appreciative, Bryher gives voice to her faith in modern American poetry which, she believes, is leading, along with American women, the march of the new. "I wanted a new world," she writes, "and in the Imagist writers, particularly in Miss Lowell—all I needed was before my eyes." (Bryher 1918, 9). Most of all, it is because Lowell's universe is "so personal" that she believes her poetry is "so strong with life." She quotes at length from Lowell's poems to demonstrate the poet's development and at the same time highlight "the new imagist tendencies" (16), the poet's spirit "sharp with vision and adventure" (Bryher 1918, 17), "the loneliness that is the core of so much" of Lowell's poetry (Bryher 1918, 30), as well as her vitality, her awareness of "injustice and repression" (Bryher 1918, 31). By the end of her survey she has drawn a portrait of the American poet that resembles more a self-portrait, or better, the image of a desired self. Exploration, adventure, the free life of a boy that she dreams for herself: she

unwittingly projects these onto her correspondent. Concluding her essay, she states that "among all poets, Miss Lowell is essentially an explorer" (Bryher 1918, 48). And this is what should stimulate British readers, she maintains, for adventure, exploration of new lands, is what she believes England is lacking. It is also what should attract British readers to American literature, though "England's attitude towards" that literature is at present "one of intolerant indifference:"

> Yet American books possess no bar of language to deter explorers . . . . I have no doubt the future will rank Miss Lowell among the great poets of all ages, but meantime I grieve the present should deny itself the acclamation of this poetry as it slips, fresh and vital, from her growing thought. (Bryher 1918, 47)

7. *Falling out of Love*

Upon receiving the book Lowell rejoices, believing that she is finally gaining a foothold of recognition in England. Bryher also provides the kind of publicity she needs to fight those in her homeland who criticize her work and that of the other Imagists.

Along with her third letter, Bryher also sends Amy Lowell a batch of her own poems, asking for critical revision, suggestions and directions. And Lowell, busy as she is, finds the time to read and edit those poems, sometimes rewriting them to show how they might be improved. She even offers to get some of them published and by the end of 1918 has managed to sell a number of them to prestigious American magazines. She takes her role as mentor and friend seriously.

In the meantime, in August, 1918, to be precise, Bryher has sought out and met H.D. in Cornwall. On their first visit Bryher brings her critical appreciation of Amy Lowell, by way of introduction, and as proof that her interest in contemporary American poetry is not the whim of a rich, spoiled child. The story of how the two women met and how their relationship evolved to become a lifelong partnership has been told by Bryher herself and by H.D.'s biographers and critics. What still remains to be said is that little by little, through H.D. and the milieu of poets H.D. introduced her to, Bryher came to see Amy Lowell in a different light. Though in her letters Lowell had written at length that she did not share Bryher's desire for adventure and advised her correspondent that adventures of the mind were to be preferred over those of the body, it was not until her first visit to the United States in 1920 and her first meeting with Amy Lowell in New York that Bryher realized Lowell was not the person she had imagined. She soon discovered that Lowell, far from belonging to the counter-hegemonic avant-gardes,

disliked them, and aligned herself with the bourgeois and hegemonic class that dominated the cultural and economic American world, though she tried to fight its patriarchal discrimination against women. Their meeting in New York ended the idealized connection established through letters and books. Though in *The Heart to Artemis* Bryher maintained that it was Lowell who "was disappointed in me," the reality was that she "was gradually moving away from a restricted world and instinctively withdrew from too strong a personality" (Bryher 1962, 199).

Even America, after the few months spent there, lost most of its gloss for Bryher. In 1925, the year of Lowell's death, Bryher published *West*, the novel she had written during her six months in America. To it she consigned the story of her break with Lowell, her falling out of romantic love with America, and the beginning of her friendship with Marianne Moore—a friendship that, as with Lowell, developed through letters and along the parallel lines of personal friendship, mentor-pupil relationship, critical and literary reciprocal support, and Bryher's patronage.

Notes

[1] The correspondence of Bryher and Amy Lowell, still unpublished, is now preserved in the Houghton Library at Harvard. Numbers following quotations refer to the page of the letter. The only critical essay with a specific focus on the relationship between the two women is Radford 2004.

[2] On intercultural contacts and transculturation see in particular Even-Zohar 2005, and Friedman 2007.

[3] For revisions of the Anglo-American modernist canon relevant here, see Lauter 1991, Scott 2004, Camboni, *Networking Women*. For a specific focus on Amy Lowell see Lauter 1990 and 2001 and Scott 2004.

[4] See in particular the two anthologies edited by Munich and Bradshaw (2002) and Honor Moore (2004), and the essays in the volume edited by Munich and Bradshaw 2004.

[5] According to Lowell's biographer Jean Gould, the disparaging epithet "hippopoetess" was coined by Harold Bynner of the Poetry Society of New York (Gould 1975, 231). It stuck to her, however, and even Hugh Kenner in *The Pound Era* used it in his ironic portrait of Lowell (Kenner 1975, 291–292). On this see also Scott 2004, 137.

[6] No biography of Bryher has yet been published. For information about her see Guest 1984, Friedman 2002, Camboni 2005 and 2008.

[7] See Flint 1912, Damon 1935, and Gould 1975. On the relevance of Flint's essays see also Pondrom 1974, who, however, fails to pay attention to Lowell. Flint's essay also had an immediate effect on Pound, who appears at that time to have known relatively little about French poetry. Two years later, in a letter to Harriet Monroe, he mentions this essay as one "which everybody has to get" (Pound 1950, 35).

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