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The Poetics of T.E. Hulme:  
Background, Theory, and Practice

George Slobodzian

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
English

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
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## ABSTRACT

### The Poetics Of T.E. Hulme: Background, Theory, and Practice

George Slobodzian

T.E. Hulme is perhaps best known as the theorist of Imagism, a poetical movement that is often chosen as the starting point for modern (as well as Modernist) poetry in English. Yet despite often being cited as one of the originators of this influential movement, Hulme's contribution to twentieth century poetry and poetics is rarely examined on its own terms, in relation to the literary and philosophical concerns of his day. Those critics who have focussed on Hulme's poetics almost invariably read it as a continuation and distillation of the so-called Romantic quest for transcendence and presence. According to these critics, Hulme is proposing a linguistically naive poetry that attempts to capture, through realistic description, the haecceity or thingness of the objects of perception which in turn will result in a transcendent fusion of subject and object. Such a reading of Hulme's poetics contrasts sharply with the anti-foundational, post-humanistic weltanschauung he develops around his concept of the cinder. In aligning Hulme's poetics with this weltanschauung this study shows the relational, mediated, linguistically-aware status of those same poetics.

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## INTRODUCTION

"The point de repère usually and conveniently taken as the starting-point of modern poetry is the group denominated 'imagists' in London about 1910," observed T.S. Eliot in 1953.<sup>1</sup> Forty years later the same position can be taken, although with somewhat less convenience. From the still influential Imagist tenets, Eliot's own "objective correlative" and William Carlos Williams' "no ideas but in things," to the more recent exhortations to "write the body" and the prevailing creative writing school maxim of "show, don't tell," much of the poetic, as well as critical, activity in English in this century has taken place and continues to take place on ground broken by those early Modernists who have come to be associated with Imagism. Initially a reaction against the overly abstract, subjective, and sentimental poetic idiom of late-Romanticism, the Imagist experiment has resulted in another dominant poetics that, in its various modes, aims at what can perhaps best be considered poetic objectivity, be it in the form of a poetically meaningful experience transmitted accurately by the poem, or of the poem itself as a linguistic construct, a verbal "thing" possessing its own inherent characteristics and meaning.

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<sup>1</sup>. T.S. Eliot, To Criticize the Critic. Eliot goes on to state that Imagism, "on the whole, is chiefly important because of the stimulus it gave to later developments" [58-9]--developments that are still very much underway.

This preoccupation with poetic objectivity was of course shared by Eliot and his largely New Critical 1953 audience, as was the belief in the need to distance modern poetry from the corrupting influence of the "dissociated consciousnesses" of the Romantics. Indeed, in isolating his own direct poetic and critical influences (and in some cases friends) as a starting point for modern poetry, Eliot is, in effect, writing his own Modernist foundation myth.

According to this version of recent literary history, one of the distinguishing features of "modern poetry" is that it is not Romantic poetry; that the early Modernist Imagists were in fact successful in breaking with their Romantic past, thus paving the way for the rehabilitation of poetry along acceptable New Critical, "neo-classical" lines.

Yet times, and maps, change. The Modernist and New Critical sense of autonomy was first challenged by critics such as M.H. Abrams and Frank Kermode who convincingly reveal the debt "modern" poetic practice and theory--including Eliot's--owe to their Romantic predecessors. According to these critics, twentieth-century poetry and poetics become an extension or continuation of the Romantic quest for a unity of expression that fuses the various oppositions of Western thought (subject and object, intellect and emotion, etc.) into an autonomous art object with decidedly transcendent capabilities. Of particular interest is Kermode's Romantic Image (1957), in which the

Imagist experiment is read as a distillation of, rather than a departure from, Romantic tenets whereby

the work of art itself is symbol, 'aesthetic monad', utterly original and not in the old sense imitated, "concrete", yet fluid and suggestive; a means to truth, a truth unrelated to, and more exalted than, that of positivist science, or any observation depending upon the discursive reason; out of the flux of life, and therefore, under one aspect, dead; yet uniquely alive because of its participation in a higher order of existence, because analogous not to a machine but to an organism; coextensive in matter and form...

[56-7]

This romanticization of modern(ist) poetry is continued by Abrams in his Natural Supernaturalism (1971), where he endorses and extends Kermode's reading:

The Romantic Moment in which, as Frank Kermode puts it, chronos suddenly becomes kairos, has had an enduring and multiform literary life. The illuminated phenomenal object, if transparent to a significance beyond itself, reappears as the symbol of the Symbolists, but if opaque, as the image of the Imagists; in both cases, however, the Romantic object is usually cut off from its context in the ordinary world and in common experience and assigned an isolated existence in the self-limited and self-sufficing work of art. [418]

For both Kermode and Abrams the poem--whether Symbolist or Imagist hardly seems to matter--becomes a transformative (as well as transparent) receptacle for the phenomenal object, encasing and raising it into the "higher order" Kermode writes of, where, as unified and unifying "Romantic object", it is safe from the relational incursions of the "ordinary world" that would threaten its uniqueness, originality, and self-sufficiency.

The complete suppression on Abrams' part as he moves matter-of-factly from phenomenal to transcendental realms,



of the textual strategies that are the poem has not gone unnoticed. J. Hillis Miller, in his review of Natural Supernaturalism, questions not only Abrams' view of the epiphanic "Romantic Moment" enduring intact, despite its different textual manifestations, into the twentieth century, but also any reading of the Romantics themselves that takes their texts at "face value". As Miller points out, "No metaphor or myth is a mere 'symbolic convenience,' separable from the thought it embodies. It is the body of that thought, the secret generator of the concepts it incarnates..." [Miller, 10] Failure to acknowledge the essential and inescapable role of this "secret generator" in their desire to read the poem as an aesthetic bridge linking sensuous and intellectual modes of apprehension implicates both Abrams and Kermode in what Paul de Man designates as the aesthetic ideology underlying much Romantic theory and practice. Manifestations of this aesthetic ideology include the above valorization of "organic form" as somehow partaking in nature, the mystifying privileging of the symbol as a transcendent vehicle, and the ultimate treatment of the poem as a hypostasized monument capable of reconciling oppositions in a "higher order of truth."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>. cf. Lindsay Waters's "Paul de Man: Life and Works", the introduction of de Man's Critical Writings, 1953--1978, in which Waters writes that de Man's "research led him to believe that the source of some of our confused notions about what role literature should play in society was that set of thinkers who had taken up the critical philosophy of Kant and transformed it into idealism, and in the process

De Man's critique of this aesthetic ideology, which he attributes to the imposed "continuity of aesthetic and rational judgment that is the main tenet and the major of crux of all critical philosophies and 'Romantic' literatures,"<sup>3</sup> results in yet another reassessment of the literary territory inhabited by the early Modernists that, for the purposes of this study, demands closer attention. However, as any reader of de Man quickly realizes, it is not in keeping with his critical agenda to supply concise, universally applicable definitions--particularly when the concept in question is so central to his project. In order to investigate the implications of de Man's critique of aesthetic ideology with regard to early Modernist poetics, it is necessary to turn briefly to an essay in which de Man brings the two together.

In "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image", de Man supplies a particularly useful insight into the ongoing dalliance with poetic presence and objectivity when he isolates a governing tendency in Romantic and post-Romantic poetry and poetics that he attributes to a "nostalgia for the object,"--in the case of the following

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had developed the ideology of the aesthetic that was responsible for concepts such as organic form and the symbol as well as for the notion that literature could be harnessed directly to political and moral ends." (lviii) This text will be referred to as CW in future references.

<sup>3</sup>. Paul de Man, Rhetoric of Romanticism, p. 239. This text will be referred as RR from now on.

example, a flower:

The obviously desirable sensory aspects of the flower express the ambivalent aspiration toward a forgotten presence that gave rise to the image, for it is in experiencing the material presence of the particular flower that the desire arises to be reborn in the manner of a natural creation. The image is inspired by a nostalgia for the natural object, expanding to become nostalgia for the origin of this object. [RR, 6]

While "the image" above refers to a specific image of a flower in a poem by Holderlin, de Man extends it to include much Romantic and post-Romantic images in general.

According to his reading, the predominance of natural objects in this poetry reflects the desire on the part of the writing subject for reunion with and recuperation of a lost unity and plenitude of being attributed to the object and to Nature as a whole. As Christopher Norris observes, "it is always through the appeal to nature[...]that aesthetic ideology most strongly asserts its hold" resulting in

that single most persistent and seductive of Romantic tropes: the organicist idea of art as a kind of second nature, a "heterocosm" where all bad antimonies fall away and imagination achieves a perfect union of subject and object, inward and outward worlds. [Norris, 62]

Thus the desire for the poem, and particularly the language of the poem, to acquire the characteristics of natural objects becomes, in de Man's reading, part and parcel of a fundamental need imposed by the humanistic aesthetic ideology for a foundational presence that will yield a unified, static being rather than an ever-striving, ever-

unfulfilled becoming.

Yet it is a need that, in poetry at least, is never satisfied; for, in de Man's words, while "poetic language seems to originate in the desire to draw closer and closer to the ontological status of the object [,] this movement is essentially paradoxical and condemned in advance to failure" [RR, 7] by the very nature of language. In the Romantic poetry that de Man is primarily, though not exclusively, concerned with, this inevitable and repeated failure becomes the dialectical engine that generates the poem, with the desire or nostalgia for the object, for presence and unified being, supplying the fuel that is combusted in poetically pressurized, reflexive language. At times, however, this dialectic is in danger of breaking down, as is the case when

romantic thought and romantic poetry seem to come so close to giving in completely to the nostalgia for the object that it becomes difficult to distinguish between object and image, between imagination and perception, between an expressive or constitutive and a mimetic or literal language. [RR, 7]

In late or post-Romantic poetry--what Eliot designates as early modern--this "giving in" to the nostalgia for the object results in a poetics of "unmediated vision" that de Man denigrates for attempting to

fuse matter and imagination by amalgamating perception and reverie, sacrificing, in fact, the demands of consciousness to the realities of the object. Critics who speak of a "happy relationship" between matter and consciousness fail to realize that the very fact that relationship has to be established within the medium of language indicates that it does not exist in actuality. [RR, 8]

Lindsay Waters, in his introduction to de Man's Critical Writings, extends this charge of linguistic and poetic naiveté to include the varied branch of poetic and critical activity spawned by the early Modernists'--specifically the Imagists'--perceived conception of poetry as "a form of ontology." [CW, xliii-iv]

De Man's implicit and Waters's explicit dismissal of the early Modernists as imploded Romantics should not come as a surprise. After all, both are merely doing to the early Modernists what the early Modernists--as well as those anti-Romantic New Critics who took them as forebears--have done to the early Romantics. One of the consequences of this literary turf warfare is the reversal of the romanticization campaign of Abrams and Kermode, with the early Modernists, according to de Man's reading, becoming the sterile fruit of a modernized, linguistically aware Romanticism. Importantly, the naive "Romantic" status allotted the early Modernists by the very critics de Man's reading of Romanticism undermines remains unchallenged, if devalued, by de Man. Even given those post-Romantic (or modern) poets whose work exhibits an acute awareness of the gap that language itself creates between the world of ontological experience, or reality, and the realm of poetic signification de Man maintains that

it seems safe to assert that the priority of the natural object remains unchallenged among the inheritors of romanticism....[T]he priority of nature is experienced as a feeling of failure and sterility,

but nevertheless asserted. A similar feeling of threatening paralysis prevails among our own contemporaries and seems to grow with the depth of their poetic commitment. It may be that this threat could only be overcome when the status of the poetic language or, more restrictively, of the poetic image, is again brought into question. [RR, 9]

What this sweeping statement overlooks, however, is that just such a reassessment was initiated--if not completed--fifty years prior to the writing of de Man's essay by one of those poets and theoreticians who appears to have succumbed whole-heartedly to a nostalgia for the object--the subject of my study, T.E. Hulme.

\*

Reading Hulme from a perspective formed, in part, by the critical and poetic activity that has come after him one is struck by a vague sense of déjà lu. The feeling of familiarity was, in my case, heightened upon reading the following admission in "The Lecture on Modern Poetry":

Speaking of personal matters, the first time I ever felt the necessity or inevitableness of verse, was in the desire to reproduce the peculiar quality of feeling which is induced by the flat spaces and wide horizons of the virgin prairie of western Canada.<sup>4</sup>

Born and raised in Saskatchewan, I am well-acquainted with the "flat spaces and wide horizons" of western Canada. This, and the fact that my own poetic exposure and

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<sup>4</sup>. Further Speculations. p. 72. This text will be referred to as FS in subsequent citations, and Speculations as S.

expectations have been influenced by the Imagistic and post-Imagistic practices and prejudices of American and Canadian models, was all that was needed to spur me on into the early Modernist no-man's land occupied by Hulme--territory that, it should be noted, we may never have left.

Perhaps best known as the theorist of Imagism, even though the appellation is not his but Ezra Pound's, so many of Hulme's assertions and observations have been taken up, expanded, and, in some cases, distorted by the poets, theoreticians, and critics who have followed him that it is difficult to approach Hulme's project on its own terms--terms which Hulme himself appropriated from the philosophical and literary discourses of his day. This is not to suggest that Hulme can be considered the sole genealogical source of the shift in poetics that he helped initiate. Far from it, for originality was not his strong suit. It means, rather, that the concerns, trends, and ideas that informed his corpus are the same that have informed the work of many of the poets and critics that followed him, making his writings, as Michael H. Levenson has rightly described them, "a lexicon of modernist possibilities" that, in part due to their unfinished, incomplete form, afford a valuable insight into the varied, at times contradictory, intellectual, cultural, poetic "raw"

material of modern and Modernist poetry and criticism.<sup>5</sup>

However, as a look at some of the more recent Hulme criticism suggests, some of the "possibilities" that Hulme offers have been exploited more than others. When de Man and, following him, Waters dismiss early Modernist poetic practice, ie. Imagism, as an untenable poetics of unmediated vision that ignores the "reality" of language there is justification. Hulme's poetics, and Imagism as a whole, have often been taken as a poetics of presence that, in an almost religious belief in the power of the image and poetic language stripped of its inessentials, attempts to fuse poetic vision with actual perception in the ultimate capitulation to the object and the longed-for presence and unity it appears to offer. Thus one gets Alun Jones, in describing Hulme's poetics, insisting that in "order to convey the uniqueness of his intuition, the poet is compelled to create new metaphors and fresh analogies. The poet lends a new vitality to language in this way and restores the direct contact between language and experience." [Jones, 51] Obviously, the status of this "direct contact" warrants investigation, particularly when the same commentator, a few pages earlier, observes that for

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<sup>5</sup>. Elsewhere Levenson writes of Hulme as an "intellectual site, a place where intellectual currents converged. If that does not make him a 'serious thinker,' it at least makes him worth taking seriously" [39].



"Hulme, the poet's intuition is dependent upon language and takes linguistic form. In other words the intuition of the poet does not merely take place in language, but the language is the intuition...." [47]

For those who see in Hulme's proto-Imagism a poetics of presence, this problematic "direct contact" is no problem at all, yielding as it does the sort of noumenal capabilities that support Kermode's "Romantic Imagism" according to which "Hulme hands over to the English tradition a modernised, but essentially traditional, aesthetic of Symbolism [....] Hulme gave it a form which has persisted into modern thought, a form which for various reasons offers an acceptable version of the magic Image" [Kermode, 135]; and, elsewhere, "Hulme's artist is really the Romantic voyant expressed in terms more agreeable...." [144] That Kermode's reading continues to exert an influence is evident in Alan Robinson's Symbol to Vortex: Painting, Poetry and Ideas, 1885--1914 (1985) which reads Imagism as an empathetic aesthetics that permits the poet to capture, in writing, what Robinson refers to as the haecceity of the objects of experience--their "'thisness'...that quality or mode of being in virtue of which a thing is or becomes a definite individual." [OED] Robinson writes that "Hulme stands out as the leading figure: a dilettante poet but an extremely important catalyst. His significance lies in the poetic and aesthetic results of his critique of Idealism and subsequent espousal

of a metaphysical, empathetic aesthetics" [Robinson, 89] that is based on "a visually denotative rather than connotative use of language [...] grounding one's work in direct observation of and response to the external world, and attempting to convey these immediately verifiable sense-data in simple, precise diction" [59]

Even among those who are more circumspect when it comes to granting poetic language such powers of immediacy and transcendence, the tendency to read Hulme as advocating a straightforward, naive, unmediated realism is strong. John T. Gage, for example, in his promisingly titled In the Arresting Eye: The Rhetoric of Imagism, in noting the discrepancy between Imagist theory and practice, reads the former as being rather hopelessly tied to the desire for direct, unmediated contact and the latter as being rhetorical despite itself.<sup>6</sup>

This linguistically naive, presence-seeking Hulme contrasts sharply with the Hulme that has surfaced recently among critics who have focussed primarily on his more theoretical writing. Take, for example, Richard Shusterman, who supplies a convenient point of departure for my own study:

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<sup>6</sup>. Gage reads Hulme in much the same way as de Man and Waters read the early Modernists, claiming that "Hulme was content to stop at the creation of a new language, so that he could see those flowers that already existed, as long as he saw them really." [26] As we shall see, not only does Hulme's conception of language deny such "seeing", so too does his conception of perception.

[Hulme's] notion of philosophy as an art of purveying attitudes rather than a science achieving truth, his attack on the intellectualist logocentric bias of Western thought, his radical linguistic-based scepticism about achieving truth because of the inevitable distortive gap between reality and any words we use to describe it, and finally, even his advocacy of the written and visual in literature as against the traditional dominance of the oral: all this is extraordinarily suggestive of some of the influential ideas associated with Derrida. Thus, for those who are all too ready to forget Hulme as a source of the now outmoded school of New Criticism, one might make a case for him as a precursor of the currently fashionable deconstructionist school of thought. [571]

Shusterman is correct in pointing to the at times uncanny similarities between Hulme's attack on the humanistic ideology he associates with Romanticism and more recent critiques of the same--and one could add to his list. The question that arises, however, is how can one accommodate Hulme the proto-deconstructor and Hulme the theoretician and poet of unmediated vision and presence? The central argument of my study is that one does not have to, that within Hulme's fragmented corpus, beneath what appears to be, and has often been taken as, a poetics of presence, of unmediated vision and direct contact, lies a nascent poetics of difference that is relational and highly mediated.

What follows is not a history of Imagism, nor a study of Hulme's sources, but, making use of both, an alternative reading of what I call Hulme's poetics--those elements of his thought and writing that have either direct or indirect bearing on the writing, as well as, ultimately, the reading

of poetry. To this end, an important part of my project is establishing the relatively uncharted relationship between Hulme's philosophical world-view--what he liked to call his weltanschauung--and his poetics taken as a component, rather than a contradiction, of that same weltanschauung. This relationship will, in turn, show the post-humanistic, post-post-Romantic, post-aesthetic ideological potential of the poetics. It is my hope that this overdue exhumation of Hulme, while focussing on Hulme's poetics, will also open the way for a more general re-appraisal of the relationship between early Modernist theory and practice and the literary activity it has influenced and continues to influence up to the present day.

The first chapter, in focussing on Hulme's formative prairie experience, will contextualize it in relation to the philosophical and literary dispensations Hulme was reacting against, as well as in relation to his own philosophical and literary output, with particular attention paid to those influences and tendencies that shaped his poetics. The second chapter will explore the cindery weltanschauung that develops out of Hulme's prairie experience, once again focussing on the influence it brings to bear on the poetics. The third chapter will shift to more explicitly poetic concerns by concentrating on the image in Hulme's writings and its relationship to the both the object of perception and the object of poetry--the poem. The fourth and final

chapter will then reassess the broader implications of Hulme's poetics from the new perspective supplied in the previous chapters.

## CHAPTER ONE

### HULME ON THE RANGE: THE PRAIRIE EPIPHANY IN AND AS CONTEXT

Every man has inside himself a kind of rock on which he builds. I am concerned entirely with these rocks.  
--T.E. Hulme, "A Tory Philosophy"

Thomas Earnest Hulme was born in 1883 and died in 1917, with his literary pursuits beginning no earlier than 1906. Thus, despite recent attempts to attribute the apparent shifts and contradictions in his thought to distinct 'early', 'middle', and 'late' Hulme incarnations, all Hulme is early Hulme. This is not to say that the shifts and contradictions do not exist, but that they are due to the embryonic status of his entire corpus--as well as to what he happened to be reading at a given time--and not to clear-cut policy decisions on his part. Indeed, despite his shifting enthusiasms, Hulme's campaign was constant in one important aspect: what he was fighting against.

This view runs counter to that of one of the more erstwhile Hulme-daters, K.E. Csengeri, whose dating scheme helps to illustrate the difficulties Hulme's corpus poses to the literary scholar:

(i) 1906-1909, a period of philosophic "nominalism" and an interest in writing poetry; (ii) 1909-1912, Bergsonian philosophy and metaphysics; and (iii) 1912-1917, the period of his interest in classicism, German aesthetics, and the visual arts. ["The Intellectual Development of T.E. Hulme", 7]

Csengeri goes on to admit to a certain degree of

"overlapping" between these periods, yet insists that the first period alone pertains to Hulme's poetic pursuits, thus excising the concerns of the latter two "periods" from any discussion of Hulme's poetry and poetics. In a separate article, however, Csengeri, in attempting to further demarcate Hulme's poetic period, reveals the limitations of his project:

Altogether, Hulme wrote only six prose pieces in which poetry is the main subject: "Notes on Language and Style" (begun about 1907), "A Lecture on Modern Poetry" (delivered in 1908 or 1909), "Searchers after Reality:II--Haldane" (published in The New Age of August 19, 1909), a review of Tancrede de Visan's L'Attitude du lyrisme contemporain (published in The New Age of August 24, 1911), "Romanticism and Classicism" (delivered as a lecture about 1912), and "German Chronicle" (published in Poetry and Drama, June 1914) ["Hulme's Borrowings from the French", 19]

The above dates alone reveal the over-lapping of Hulme's concerns to be far from dismissable. This is even more the case if one takes into account the fact that the "late" "German Chronicle" combines the interest in German aesthetics of the so-called late Hulme with what appears to be a keen interest in German Expressionist poetry and poetics. Adding further to Csengeri's burden of proof is the fact that the pivotal "Lecture on Modern Poetry" was delivered for a second time in 1914 and it is this "revised" (though how revised will never be known) version that survives today.

Although Csengeri limits himself to those texts whose main subject is poetry, Hulme never wrote a definitive

treatise on it or any other subject. As the above list indicates, Hulme's corpus consists entirely of articles, published lectures, poems, fragments, letters and edited note-books. Apart from Hulme's actual (and, by all accounts, influential) conversations, which, other than some highly provocative reminiscences, have been lost to the flux, this last group is the most problematic and the most important, for Hulme was a diligent note-taker and it is in these notes that he most fully develops and explores his own position. Their editor, Herbert Read, attests to their centrality when he writes of Hulme's "daybook, which he always carried with him, and into which he entered every thought or observation as it occurred to him." Out of this daybook, according to Read, were culled the more salient observations and thoughts which were then earmarked for inclusion in the various books Hulme envisioned, but never wrote. [S,xii]

Of particular importance to my study are the "Notes on Language and Style," begun "about 1907" according to Csengeri, and those notes, apparently begun at the same time, that outline Hulme's developing weltanschauung. According to Read,

this was to be a personal philosophy, cast into an allegorical form perhaps analogous to Nietzsche's Zarathustra, and having as its final object the destruction of the idea that the world has unity, or that anything can be described in words. The notes for this book stretch over a considerable period--perhaps ten or fifteen years--and are constantly rewritten and amended.....The more coherent fragments have been



gathered together in this volume under Hulme's own title Cinders. [S, xiv]

Not explicitly "about" poetry (but themselves highly poetic), Hulme's "Cinders" are invaluable when it comes to aligning Hulme's poetics with the philosophical territory he was exploring. Unfortunately, Read did not heed Hulme's own proviso that "these various little notes will never combine because in their nature they cannot." [S, 238] That the composition of "Cinders" spanned Hulme's entire writing life, as well as Read's having left them permanently abridged in his bid for coherence, makes it all the more necessary to read Hulme's corpus as an embryonic whole, contradictions and all, rather than in overly distinct periods.

The decision to place the beginning of Hulme's literary activity in 1906 is not my own, but my subject's. It was in July of that year that Hulme, after being sent down from Cambridge two years earlier for insubordination (a common Hulme trait), travelled to Canada, where, according to the scant biographical information on this part of his life,<sup>7</sup> he spent the next eight months working as a railroad and

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<sup>7</sup>. So far, two "critical biographies" of Hulme have been written, Michael Roberts's T.E. Hulme, and A.R. Jones's The Life and Opinions of T.E. Hulme. Herbert Read also supplies a "biographical sketch" in his introduction to Speculations, though for some reason he limits Hulme's Canadian stay to three months while both Roberts and Jones list it as lasting eight months.

farm labourer. While on the Canadian prairie Hulme appears to have undergone a poetic awakening, which he relates in his "Lecture on Modern Poetry" delivered for the first time in 1908 before the Poet's Club of which he was also a member. Far more than a fragment of biographical trivia, Hulme's prairie experience attains, in his own eyes, the status of a formative epiphany that he is careful to oppose to those of his predecessors:

You see that this is essentially different to the lyrical impulse which has attained completion, and I think once and forever, in Tennyson, Shelley and Keats. To put this modern conception of the poetic spirit, this tentative and half-shy manner of looking at things, into regular metre is like putting a child into armour. [FS, 72]

In singling out Tennyson, Shelley and Keats as representative of an exhausted mode, Hulme is not, of course, merely voicing his personal distaste for a poetic style. He is reacting against the dominant, though decaying, literary and intellectual dispensation of his day. As we know, such reactions are always bound to and by what they are reacting against, and Hulme's is no different. As a result, a great deal of Hulme criticism has busied itself with determining to what degree Hulme's own position is implicated in the position he opposes, with particular scrutiny directed at the anti-Romanticism evidenced above. Certainly any study of Hulme's intellectual development must address the status of what Murray Krieger has labelled

Hulme's "ambiguous anti-Romanticism,"<sup>8</sup> but more relevant to my study is how Hulme's distrust of what he considers--correctly or not--to be Romanticism and the lyrical impulse he associates with it is itself a symptom of a more fundamental complaint that interpenetrates the various phases of his brief career.

That Hulme's prairie experience, as presented in the "Lecture on Modern Poetry", warrants the attention that I am giving it is further bolstered by the numerous direct and indirect references to it scattered throughout Hulme's writings. In "Cinders", for example, Hulme writes that

Formerly, one liked theories because they reduced the world to a single principle. Now the same reason disgusts us. The flats of Canada are incomprehensible on any single theory. The world only comprehensible on the cinder theory. [S,223]

Here, and elsewhere, the prairie epiphany not only supplies Hulme with an initial impetus (all the more significant in that he posits it after the fact), it becomes a means of verification for, and the basis of, his entire weltanschauung.<sup>9</sup> A thematic topos emerges which brings

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<sup>8</sup>. Murray Krieger, "The Ambiguous Anti-Romanticism of T.E. Hulme". Krieger focusses on Hulme's allegiance to Coleridgean Fancy, as well as the apparent discrepancy between Hulme's denial of poetic transcendence and fondness for Bergsonian intuition, which seems to "allow precisely for this possibility." [307] As we shall see, Bergsonian intuition does play a major role in Hulme's poetics, but not at the expense of his anti-Romanticism--something that Krieger, one of Hulme's more astute readers, acknowledges.

<sup>9</sup>. Of Hulme's Canadian experience, A.R. Jones writes that "In Canada he began to see more clearly those relations between man and his environment, man and his art, and man

with it a metaphoric vocabulary enabling him to assert that the "inner spirit of the world is miles and miles of ploughed fields"[S,237] and that we must see the "different manifestations of the cinders; otherwise we cannot work the extended clay."[S,245] The nature of this cryptic "cinder theory" is central to my study, as is the relationship between it and Hulme's poetics. As it turns out, the two share a common impetus in "the peculiar quality of feeling which is induced by the flat spaces and wide horizons of the virgin prairie of western Canada."

Hulme writes that he came "to verse from the inside rather than from the outside," [FS,68] it being the poet in him, rather than the theorist, critic or philosopher, that was first roused to "fix" "certain impressions" apprehended on the prairie. Among the poems and fragments in print are several attempts to do just that. One, which found its way into "The Embankment: (The fantasia of a fallen gentleman on a cold, bitter night)" as

Oh, God, make small  
The old star-eaten blanket of the sky,  
That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie(,)  
[Jones, 159]

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and his God, the definitions of which were to occupy his attentions for the rest of his life. In the cold vastness of Canada he experienced the essential difference between the human and the divine worlds." [Life and Opinions of T.E. Hulme, 23-4] While Jones is primarily interested in the latter, Hulme himself will place poetic activity in the former.

appears in various incarnations, notably accompanied at one point by the heading "'Religion is the expansive lie of temporary warmth'":

No blanket is the sky to keep warm the little stars.  
Somewhere the gods (the blanket-makers in the prairie  
of cold)  
Sleep in their blankets(.) [FS,216]

Putting aside the experimental (or not-so-experimental) poetics of these exercises, what is most striking is the preoccupation with physical and spiritual discomfort and absent divinities, themes which are magnified in another poem with explicit ties to the prairie:

At night!  
All the terror's in that.  
Branches of the dead tree  
Silhouetted on the hill's edge.  
Dark veins diseased,  
On the dead white body of the sky.  
The tearing iron hook  
Of pitiless Mara.  
Handling soft clouds in insurrection.  
Brand of the obscene gods  
On their flying cattle,  
Roaming the sky prairie.

[FS, 218]

While the series of incongruent, hard visual images and the absence of the lyrical "I" offer a good example of Hulme practising his own poetics, this poem appears to be the product of a familiar Romantic lyrical impulse: excessive emotion in the presence of Nature. How is the impulse that generated it "essentially different", as Hulme maintains it is, from the lyrical impulse he associates with Romanticism?

Once again in the "Lecture on Modern Poetry", Hulme characterizes the "position exactly opposite to the one" he

takes up as only he could:

A reviewer writing in The Saturday Review last week spoke of poetry as the means by which the soul soared into higher regions, and as a means of expression by which it became merged into a higher reality. Well, that is the kind of statement that I utterly detest. I want to speak of verse in a plain way as I would of pigs: that is the only honest way. [FS, 67]

Not only does this passage show Hulme's desire to shift attention from the poem as a vehicle of transcendence to the more mundane concerns of technique and form, it also identifies the critical discourse Hulme opposes as that of Romantic transcendentalism. The "means of expression" that Shelley, in his Defense of Poetry (a work with which the above reviewer and Hulme were both, presumably, familiar), equates with a "lyric essence" "connate with the origin of man," Hulme associates with a particular conception of the human rooted in certain assumptions that, for reasons that should become clear, can be best understood in Kantian terms.

Biographical lore has it that Hulme's "chief pleasure in life lay in reading Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason while lying prone, at full length, in a well-filled, warm bathtub..." [FS,xxx] and Pound records Hulme's interest in Kant in the Cantos:

And he read Kant in the  
Hospital, in Wimbledon,  
in the original,  
And the hospital staff didn't like it.

While it is difficult to determine the extent of Hulme's

immersion in Kant's texts at the time of his first delivering the "Lecture on Modern Poetry", not only does Kant, through people such as Coleridge and Shelley, supply the aesthetic framework for Romantic theories of poetry, his critical philosophy also laid the groundwork for that other intellectual trend Hulme tries so desperately to buck: Scientific Humanism.

The relationship between the Romantic emphasis on the transcendent capabilities of the imagination and the Humanist conception of the human animal rationale capable of achieving a perfected humanism through the application of scientific, mechanizing reason may not be obvious. However, in Kant we see that the aesthetic experience, be it that of the beautiful or the sublime, ultimately results in a reaffirmation of the legislating powers of all of the faculties of human cognition. Indeed, it is this edifying function of the aesthetic experience and the pressure it places on poetic language that de Man makes the basis of his critique of aesthetic ideology. This is evident in his reading of Kant's third critique in the essay "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant" where he exposes a "deep, perhaps fatal break or discontinuity" between the faculties of mind that the critique is designed to unify--a "disarticulation" that Hulme's prairie epiphany enacts.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>. Paul de Man, "Phenomenality and Materiality in Kant", in Hermeneutics, edited by Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica. This text will be referred to as pmk in following

According to Kant, our experience of the beautiful in nature or in art, while "disinterested" in that it is not harnessed to the concepts of instrumental Reason, results in a union (or "harmonizing," as Shelley might put it) with the "subjective purposiveness of Nature" that is far from disinterested. As Kant himself writes,

Natural beauty gives a veritable extension, not, of course, to our knowledge of objects of nature, but to our knowledge of nature itself--nature as mere mechanism being enlarged to the conception of nature as art--an extension inviting profound inquiries as to the possibility of such a form. [23.5, 496]

This "veritable extension," which D.W. Crawford aptly observes presents "nature as if it were designed for our purpose, thus symbolizing the idea of our dominion over it," [Crawford, 157-8] functions to reaffirm a decidedly anthropocentric conception of the human in Nature--a conception that is reflected in Coleridge's paean to the faculty responsible, the imagination:

The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. [Coleridge, 26]

Here the perceiving human subject and the faculties which sustain it echo a supersensible cosmic subjectivity that underwrites all of Creation--the author of the Big Poem, as it were. As a result, human subjectivity is capitalized and expanded, with the products of the imagination becoming powerful instruments or agents of inclusion in this

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citations.



expansion, as is evident in Shelley's claim that

Poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and it adds beauty to that which is most deformed;...it subdues to union under its light yoke, all irreconcilable things...all that it touches, and every form moving within the radiance of its presence is changed by wondrous sympathy to an incarnation of the spirit which it breathes. [Hazard Adams, 512]

Yet no matter how light the yoke, it is still a yoke. What Hulme associates with the lyric impulse is precisely this tendency to transform "all irreconcilable things" into extensions or substituting symbols of what, as Hulme sees it, is an all-too-human spirit.

Like the Romantics before him, Hulme is interested in lifting veils and revealing a more essential reality; yet for him beauty does not act as a bond which guarantees our involvement in (and legislation of) this reality. It is given instead the deflated status of an intermediate, arrested stage which leads him to consider the Romantic cult of Beauty as adolescent and, in its later stages, somewhat masturbatory. "Beauty is the marking-time, the stationary vibration, the feigned ecstasy of an arrested impulse unable to reach its natural end" [S, 266] becomes the epitaph for one of his poems, while his suspicion of beauty is apparent in his frequent subversions of the Romantic idiom in lines such as "The lark crawls on the cloud/ Like a flea on a white body." Or,

...Beauty, like a thick scented veil,  
Stifled me,  
Tripped me up, tight round my limbs,

Arrested me. [S,267]

It seems that Hulme finds Keats's (or his urn's) "Beauty is truth; truth beauty" wanting. In the above passage beauty becomes one of the impediments, all the more pernicious because of its attractiveness, that must be removed or overcome if the poetic impulse is to "reach its natural end", whatever that might be.

Obviously a poem such as "At Night," with its "dark veins diseased/ On the dead white body of sky," does not attempt to turn anything "to loveliness." It does, however, along with Hulme's autobiographical description of his prairie epiphany, appear to partake in the other component of Kant's aesthetics, the sublime. Certainly the "flat spaces and wide horizons" of the western prairie, in their "absolute greatness", supply Hulme with the requisite form of nature to trigger the Kantian sublime, yet there are important differences between what I call Hulme's epiphany and Kant's treatment of the sublime in the third critique.

Kant stresses that the sublime, despite the initial unease it instills in us, delights--as well as empowers. While things of such magnitude that they may be considered "absolutely great" produce "at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain its estimation by reason," this displeasure, according to Kant's formulation, yields an "awakened pleasure"

arising from this very judgment of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us a law (of reason)...[27.2, 501]

Thus what is initially a sense of human inadequacy is turned by Reason into a confirmation of Reason's pre-eminence and dominion over nature, what de Man in his reading of the Kantian sublime likens to a "nobility, a morally elevated state of mind that will subreptitiously be transferred to objects and things." [pmk,139]

Whereas the Kantian sublime leads ultimately to an increase in our sense of our own power over a unified nature--Reason's dominion--Hulme's epiphany leads in the opposite direction. Having no non-sensuous standard on hand, the terror of "At Night" is neither transformed nor transforming as the obscene gods remain ob-scene ("off-stage" and plural) while "the fantasia of a fallen gentleman" to wrap himself in "the old star-eaten blanket of the sky" remains just that--an expansive, and inadequate, delusion that contrasts sharply with the sense of security that Kant makes a precondition of the dynamic sublime:

the boundless ocean rising with rebellious force...and the like, make our power of resistance of trifling moment in comparison with their might. But, provided our own position is secure, their aspect is all the more attractive for its fearfulness; and we readily call these objects sublime, because they raise the forces of the soul above the height of vulgar commonplace, and discover within us a power of resistance of quite another kind, which gives us the courage to be able to measure ourselves against the seeming omnipotence of nature. [503, emphasis added]

It seems safe to assume that Hulme did not observe the cold

barren prairie, itself more an absence than a presence of Nature's might, only from the warmth and security of a heated pullman. The removal or suppression of both physical and rational shelter in Hulme's epiphany leaves the imagination in a precarious and pivotal position. As de Man writes,

the faculty that establishes the superiority of the mind over nature is reason and reason alone; the imagination's security depends on the actual, empirical physical situation and, when this situation is threatening, it swings toward terror and toward a feeling of free submission to nature. [pmk,139]

While in the Kantian sublime the imagination will swing back to Reason, for Hulme it does not. The dislodged imagination is forced to fend for itself amid the sensuous manifold that, it should be noted, cannot rightfully be considered "Nature", for such a totality can only be granted from the unifying vantage point that Reason affords. Instead, as it turns toward the disunity of the sensuous manifold, it is limited to generating what de Man describes as "partial totalizations within an economy of profit and loss" [pmk, 130] that, like the star-eaten blanket of the sky, offer, at best, temporary comfort.

In a sense then, Hulme's prairie epiphany is better understood as a counter-epiphany, if, by epiphany, one means, as Charles Taylor does, a revelation that "has great moral and spiritual significance; that in it lies the key to a certain depth, or fulness, or seriousness, or intensity of life, or to a certain wholeness." [Taylor,422] Certainly

Hulme's short-circuiting of the Kantian sublime has "great moral and spiritual significance," but only through its negating the accessibility of "safe" (and for Kant moral) supersensible ground or of any other affirming agency that will yield "fulness" or "wholeness". "Courage in the Wild West," he tellingly remarks in the preface to "Cinders" subtitled A Sketch of a New Weltanschauung, "requires capacities different from the city." [S,218] What these capacities are remains to be seen, but at this point it should be clear that, rather than raising the "forces of the soul", or the faculties of human cognition, "above the height of vulgar commonplace," they will involve a reorientation of the human that springs from the unsettling and decentering counter-epiphanic awareness of our limitation, our smallness and finiteness.

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A two year span separates Hulme's actual prairie experience and his positing it as formative. After leaving Canada he travelled to Brussels, where he read Continental philosophy and literary theory. Upon his return to London in 1907 he set out, with what appears to have been a certain "inevitableness and necessity," to make a name for himself in avant-garde London circles, notably the Poet's Club and, after that, the group that met at the Eiffel Tower Cafe--the

so-called "forgotten school of 1909" out of which Imagism, among other things, sprang.<sup>11</sup> The aim of both groups was to develop and promote an alternative to what was considered, by those involved, the appalling state of poetry at the time. This is how Hulme describes it in the "Lecture on Modern Poetry":

The latter stages in the decay of an art form are very interesting and worth study because they are peculiarly applicable to the state of poetry at the present day. They resemble the latter stages in the decay of religion when the spirit has gone and there is a meaningless reverence for formalities and ritual. The carcass is dead, and all the flies are upon it. Imitative poetry springs up like weeds, and women whimper and whine of you and I alas, and roses, roses all the way. It becomes the expression of sentimentality rather than of virile thought. [FS, 68-9]

It is in this context of poetic revitalization that Hulme presents his prairie epiphany as an alternative poetic impulse, the products of which I am most concerned with in this study. However, just as the epiphany helps to contextualize Hulme's impulse, it also serves as context for his varied output as anti-Romantic, anti-Humanist, and anti-Rationalist. The resistance to the anthropocentric over-valuation of the human as depicted in the above treatment of the epiphany is central to Hulme's enterprise, determining and conditioning the various enthusiasms and aversions which

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<sup>11</sup>. While the extent of Hulme's role and influence in these two groups is debatable, his, by all accounts, considerable presence is not. Thus Jones cites F.S. Flint writing in 1915 that "In all this Hulme was the ringleader. He insisted too on absolutely accurate presentation and no verbiage. There was a lot of talk and practice among us of what we called the Image." [Jones, 34]

inform his shifting position.

Perhaps its most familiar and influential manifestation is his Classical/Romantic dichotomy, with the latter's tendency to regard "man, the individual, [as an] infinite reservoir of possibilities" being a product of "the humanist ideology,"

which looks on man and life as good, and which is thus in relation of harmony with existence.[...] Such a humanism in all its varying forms of pantheism, rationalism and idealism, really constitutes a complete anthropomorphisation of the world. [S, 62]

Hulme will eventually trace this "complete anthropomorphisation" and the anthropocentric "attitude to the cosmos" that generates it back to the Renaissance where he finds "the seed which is bound inevitably later to develop into sentimental, utilitarian romanticism" in "the appearance of a new attitude of acceptance to life, as opposed to an attitude of renunciation. As a consequence of this there emerges a new interest in man and his relationship to the environment." [S,25] It is this "new" anthropocentric Humanist orientation of the human in the environment--be it as Nature, world, or Cosmos--and the habits of mind which sustain it that Hulme struggles to escape and against which his efforts, poetic and otherwise, may be judged.

Thus, in anticipation of de Man's critique of aesthetic ideology, Hulme denounces the "spilt religion" of Romanticism for granting the imagination transcendent

capabilities that it does not possess, singling out

the metaphysic which in defining beauty or the nature of art always drags in the infinite. Particularly in Germany, the land where theories of aesthetics were first created, the romantic aesthetes collated all beauty to an impression of the infinite involved in the identification of our being in absolute spirit. In the least element of beauty we have an intuition of the whole world. Every artist is a kind of pantheist. [S, 131]

In opposition to this unifying pantheistic tendency Hulme argues for "the re-establishment of the temper or disposition of mind which can look at a gap or chasm without shuddering" [S,4] based on the "sane classical dogma of Original Sin"--an original fallenness from the articulated unity of the faculties that aesthetic ideology presupposes (and then goes on to establish), as well as from the ascendancy of human Reason which such maneuvering services. As a result, he privileges Fancy, the finite, recombinant imagination whose "partial totalizations" are never granted transcendent capabilities, over the Imagination, arguing that, "even in the most imaginative flights" in the "classical" poetry he advocates

there is always a holding back, a reservation. The classical poet never forgets this finiteness, this limit of man. He remembers always that he is mixed up with earth. He may jump, but he always returns back; he never flies away into the circumambient gas. [S, 120]

As we shall see, the site and status of the poet's "return" to "earth" will have a direct bearing on the status of Hulme's poetics.



While the fortunes of the Romantic Imagination circa 1908 were faltering, the gains made by Reason under the banner of Scientific Humanism were considerable and, for some, threatening. Not long after delivering his "Lecture on Modern Poetry" for the first time, Hulme began his lifelong association with the alternative publication New Age. Among those articles that appeared in 1909 is a series entitled "Searchers for Reality" in which he diagnoses "the disease of intellectualism" which

takes a bad analogy, logic and the geometric sciences, which are in essence identical, and asserts that the flux of phenomena which apparently contradicts this is not real, and can really be resolved into logical concepts...everything is reduced to law, so that omnipotent intelligence, able to seize the entire universe at a glance could construct from that its past and future. [FS,4]

Sounding every bit like the post-structuralists he has recently been compared to, Hulme identifies an insidious logocentrism permeating all levels of intellectual inquiry.

Elsewhere he points out the limitations of this over-extension of rational methodology when he notes that

logical reasoning is simply a means of passing from a certain premise to certain conclusions. It has in itself no motive power at all. It is quite impotent to deal with those first premises. It is a kind of building art; it tells you how to construct a house on a given piece of ground, but it will not choose the ground where you build. That is decided by things outside its scope altogether. ["A Tory Philosophy", Jones,194]

Hulme's attempt to investigate the above motive power, beyond (or beneath) "logical reasoning," places him in what he considers to be, in a reference to his own frontier

experience. "the actual frontier position of modern speculation" where the list of like- and not-so-like-minded frontiersmen that Hulme encounters reads like a who's who of pre- and early modernist thought: Nietzsche, Dilthey, Weber, the early work of Husserl, Meinong. They all receive at least passing reference in his writing, yet none left as deep and problematic an impression as Henri Bergson.

"I felt the exhilaration," Hulme writes in 1909 of his first reading Bergson, "that comes with the sudden change from a cramped and contracted to a free and expanded state of the same thing. It was an almost physical sense of exhilaration, a sudden expansion, a kind of mental explosion." [FS, 30] This "sudden change"--like all sudden changes--demands close attention, for while the germ of Hulme's poetics can be found in Bergson's "new method" of intuition, Hulme's conversion to Bergsonism was not as blind, nor as complete, as his enthusiasm suggests. Before the impact and implications of Hulme's departure from Bergsonism proper can be assessed in the following chapter, however, it is necessary to outline what, exactly, Hulme found in Bergson from which to depart.

While the repercussions of the wave of Bergsonism that swept through early Modernist thought are still being investigated, clearly there was something in Bergson's vitalistic philosophy for which the early twentieth century mind--including Hulme's--hungered. According to Hulme, the

attraction lies in the alternative Bergson offers once the "disease of intellectualism" has been diagnosed:

The intellectualists, the lay theologians, having been violently expelled from their temple and the final admission made that logical thought is by its nature incapable of containing the flux of reality. What remains? Are we to resign ourselves to ignorance of the nature of the cosmos, or is there some new method open to us. Bergson says that there is--that of intuition. [FS,5]

Like Hulme, Bergson was driven by a distrust of the claims made for the rational intellect by positive science. This distrust leads him to question the epistemological framework laid out by Kant in his first critique:

according to Kant...facts are spread out on a plane as fast as they arise; they are external to each other and external to the mind. Of a knowledge from within, that would grasp them in their springing forth instead of taking them already sprung, that would dig beneath space and spatialized time there is never any question. Yet it is indeed beneath this plane that our consciousness places us; there flows true duration. [Bergson, Creative Evolution, 361]

"True duration" is Bergson's durée, which is perhaps best understood as real, experienced time as opposed to Kant's and positive science's mathematically spatialized time-condition. In a letter to one of his mentors, Bergson stresses its importance:

I consider the very center of the doctrine to be: the intuition of duration. The representation of a heterogenous, qualitative, creative duration is the point from which I departed and to which I have constantly returned. It demands a very great effort of the mind, the breaking of many frames, something like a new method of thought (for the immediate is far from being what is easiest to perceive). [Scharfstein,48]

Much of Bergson's corpus is concerned with entering and

investigating this quasi-Heraclitean flow through intuition, despite the intellect's natural inclination to immobilize it for its (ie. Reason's) own practical purposes. However, like the immediate, the intuitive method is not easily pinned down.

In the introduction to his 1912 translation of Bergson's Introduction to Metaphysics, Hulme stresses this work's importance on the grounds that in it "M. Bergson explains, at greater length and in greater detail than in the other books, exactly what he means to convey by the word intuition." [IM,7] Yet, as is often the case with Bergson, an exact definition of the term is not forthcoming. We are told that by "intuition is meant the kind of intellectual sympathy by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible." [IM, 24] This placement, particularly when the object in question is what Bergson calls the "inner self", leads to a direct, yet inexpressible, apprehension of durée. The metaphysics of the book's title is in turn presented as a "true empiricism" that, through the use of this sympathetic faculty, "proposes to get as near to the original itself as possible, to search deeply into its life, and so, by a kind of intellectual auscultation, to feel the throbbings of its soul..." [IM,36]

Whereas rational science, according to Bergson, is limited to reconstructing its object out of concepts and

relations which necessarily miss its essence, intuition installs itself directly in the object prior to the positing of the phenomena/noumena schism which Kant overcomes aesthetically in the third critique. Via intuition, subject and object merge in an ineffable apprehension of durée-- itself an inverted, radically material heterogenous version of the transcendental Absolute. Of course, the recuperative presence-yielding union that intuitive engagement with this reality entails is suspiciously similar to the sort of Romantic 'hocus-pocus' Hulme condemns--a charge that appears warranted once durée is grafted onto the élan vital, the evolutionary "life-force" of Bergson's philosophy that finds its fullest expression in the workings of human consciousness.

The apparent contradiction of Hulme, the anti-Romantic, embracing Bergson and then going on to adapt a poetics borrowed, for the most part, from the latter's intuitive method has led to charges of muddled thinking that, once corrected, results in a shift away from poetry and poetics, as well as Bergson, towards art criticism and a more rigidly "classical" outlook.<sup>12</sup> This reading is encouraged by the

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<sup>12</sup>. Csengeri's dating scheme assumes such an about-face in regard to Hulme's poetics and art criticism, yet Csengeri also sees a certain amount of continuity in Hulme's career: "It is interesting to note that in spite of these developments and changes in mind, the idea underlying his first work, "Cinder," was still present even in his last work; to the very end he clung to his idea of discontinuity." [idteh, 23] This observation needs two modifications. One, "Cinders", as a note-book, was not

type of art Hulme endorses in his art criticism. In the "Lecture on Modern Poetry" Hulme proclaims that the modern mind embraces the relative and "we are no longer concerned that stanzas shall be shaped and polished like gems, but rather that some vague mood shall be communicated. In the arts we seek for the maximum of individual and personal expression"; [FS,72] yet the depersonalized, geometric abstraction that he applauds in artists such as Wyndham Lewis and Jacob Epstein suggests an about-face on his part. This shift appears to affect the poetics when, in the influential "Romanticism and Classicism", he calls for a new classical verse of small dry things that emphasizes "hard accurate description" as opposed to the expression of "some vague mood."

In order to begin to determine how, if it all, this apparent shift can be accommodated within a consistent poetics, it is necessary to turn to the source of much of Hulme's later thinking on aesthetics and art, Wilhelm Worringer's Abstraction and Empathy where, Hulme writes, he

found an extraordinarily clear statement founded on an extensive knowledge of the history of art, of a view very like the one I tried to formulate. I heard him lecture last year and had an opportunity of talking with him at the Berlin Congress. I varied to a certain extent from my original position under the influence of his vocabulary.... [FS,120]

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Hulme's "first work," but his drawing-board throughout his writing life; and, two, in directly connecting his poetics to the cinders, Hulme forces his critics to consider the poetics in relation to his entire corpus.

Writing in Germany in 1908, Worringer aligns the vital and geometric art Hulme refers to with the empathy and abstraction of his title, which in turn spring from opposed "attitudes" towards the world or cosmos which bring with them specific "psychic needs" that the work of art fulfills. Hulme summarizes Worringer's basic argument in the 1914 "Modern Art":

1. There are two kinds of art, geometrical or abstract, and vital and realistic, which differ absolutely in kind from the other. They are not modifications of one and the same art, but pursue different aims and are created to satisfy a different desire of the mind.
2. Each of these arts springs from, and corresponds to, a certain attitude towards the world. You get long periods of time in which only one of these arts and its corresponding mental attitude prevails. The naturalistic art of Greece and the Renaissance corresponded to a certain rational humanistic attitude towards the universe, and the geometrical has always gone with a different attitude of greater intensity than this.
3. The re-emergence of geometrical art at the present day may be the precursor of the re-emergence of the corresponding general attitude towards the world, and so of the final break-up of Renaissance. [FS,119]

As the above outline suggests, in Worringer Hulme finds not merely an analytical tool for his art criticism, but a means of distinguishing the new dispensation in the arts and thought that he anticipates from the "rational humanistic" one it will replace. The problem, however, is that the vitalistic "urge to empathy" that Worringer attributes to much Western post-Renaissance art would appear to include any poetics based on Bergsonian intuition.

According to Worringer, empathy (Einfühlung) is characterized by a feeling one's self into an object--be it

a work of art, a tree, or all of God's creation--that results in aesthetic pleasure attributable to "self-objectification". The subject believes it is responding to something essential to the object, but is in fact responding to what it gives to the object in the apperceptive activity, for, as Worringer states it,

The sensation of happiness that is released in us by the reproduction of organically beautiful vitality, what modern man designates beauty, is a gratification of that inner need for the self-activation in which Lipps sees the presupposition of the process of empathy. Aesthetic enjoyment is objectified self-enjoyment. The value of a line, of a form consists for us in the value of the life that it holds for us. It holds its beauty only through our own vital feeling, which, in some mysterious manner, we project into it. [AE, 14]

As with the lyrical impulse that in Shelley's claims for poetry reaches cosmic proportions, the urge to empathy results in a union of subject and object. Similarly, Bergsonian intuition, by installing itself directly into the object in question, circumvents the subject/object schism and arrives at a direct apprehension of the real--the throbbings of the élan vital that generate both subject and object.

Worringer attributes this urge to empathy to "a happy pantheistic relationship of confidence between man and the phenomena of the external world" [AE, 15] that, in the case of rational Humanism, is the result of an "intellectual mastery of the world-view." "Amongst a people with such a predisposition," he writes,



this sensuous assurance, this complete confidence in the external world, this unproblematic sense of being at home in the world, will lead, in a religious respect, to a naive anthropomorphic pantheism or polytheism, and in respect of art to a happy, world-revering naturalism. [AE.45]

Not surprisingly, given Bergson's privileging of the vital and organic and Hulme's emphasis on physical description, Hulme's poetics are indeed sometimes read as a "world-revering naturalism" (as in Robinson), as is (and can be) some of the poetry written under the loose aegis of Imagism. Yet, as I have suggested and as will be more fully explored in the coming chapter, Hulme is not merely an English Bergson. While he does adapt certain key elements of Bergsonism to his poetics, his own weltanschauung, as depicted in his "Cinders", cannot be interpreted as a "happy pantheism."

On the contrary, Hulme's position and the prairie epiphany that generates it has much more in common with the preconditions of Worringerian abstraction, what Worringer describes as "a great inner unrest inspired in man by the phenomena of the outside world" which he describes "as an immense spiritual dread of space." [AE,15] Worringer attributes this "dread of space" and "the extended, disconnected, bewildering world of phenomena" to an "instinctive fear conditioned by man's feeling of being lost in the universe" [AE,16]. This fear results in an art that attempts to "wrest the object of the external world out of its natural context, out of the unending flux of being, to

purify it of all its dependence upon life..." [AE,17].

While Hulme himself never explicitly applies Worringer's empathy/abstraction polarity to his poetics, such a maneuver, as the above analysis of the prairie epiphany indicates, is not uncalled for, nor unprecedented.<sup>13</sup>

However, before it is possible to ascertain the status that Hulme grants the poem in relation to the "disconnected, bewildering world of phenomena," it is first necessary to chart those aspects of his cindery weltanschauung that will have a direct bearing on the poetics.

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<sup>13</sup>. One Hulme commentator who has attempted to establish a connection between Hulme's poetics and the influence of Worringer is Joseph Frank. As we shall see in Chapter Four, Frank's attempt is of some interest.

## CHAPTER TWO

### "THE BRAND OF THE OBSCENE GODS": HULME IN THE CINDERS

All these cinders, he feels them burning in his flesh.  
--Jacques Derrida. Cinders

The recent trend toward regarding Hulme as a proto-post-structuralist owes a great deal to the fragmented document entitled "Cinders: A New Weltanschauung" in which he complains that

The same old fallacy persists--the desire to introduce a unity in the world: (1) The mythologists made it a woman or an elephant: (2) The scientists made fun of the mythologists but they themselves turned the world into the likeness of a mechanical toy. They were more concerned with models than with woman (woman troubled them and hence their particular form of anthropomorphism). [...] The truth remains that the world is not any unity, but a house in the cinders (outside in the cold, primeval). (S,223)

In opposition to the idealized unity of both the symbol-making mythologists and the deterministic scientists, the disunity and desolation that trigger the prairie epiphany, and that in the Kantian sublime are ultimately accommodated under the unifying powers of Reason, become the characteristics of Hulme's decentered and denatured weltanschauung based on a "cinder theory" that denies any lasting or fundamental unity whatsoever.

Given Hulme's own positing of these cinders "as foundations for (i) philosophy (ii) aesthetics" [FS,88] and his description of the poetic impulse as "the cinders drunk for a minute" [FS, 90] an investigation into the cinders is

not only overdue, but indispensable to the orienting of Hulme's general poetics and the poetry that it anticipates. However, defining the cinder, be it as particle or concept, as presented in the incomplete, recombined and edited "Cinders", as well as in the equally fragmented "Notes on Language and Style", is not an easy task. It is made easier, though, once Hulme's cinders are set beside Bergson's corresponding inversion of the absolute. This is particularly the case if Patricia Rae is correct in her assertion that Hulme takes his cinders from the following passage in Bergson's Creative Evolution:<sup>14</sup>

we catch a glimpse of a simple process, an action which is making itself across an action of the same kind which is unmaking itself, like the fiery path torn by the last rocket of a fireworks display through the black cinders of the spent rockets that are falling dead. [250-1]

The "simple process" is durée grafted onto the élan vital, the life-force which informs and drives all of creation and, via the intuition of durée, includes and is accessible by human consciousness. As Bergson explains, "consciousness, again, is the name for that which subsists of the rocket itself, passing through the fragments and lighting them up into organisms." [CE, 261]

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<sup>14</sup>. Patricia Rae, "T.E. Hulme's French Sources: A Reconsideration", p. 87. Rae's investigation into Hulme's sources and Wallace Martin's "The Sources of the Imagist Aesthetic" convincingly show Hulme's debt to Bergson and the French intuitionist school of psycho-philosophy in general, at the expense of those who see in Hulme a regurgitated Symboliste aesthetic.

As with so much of Bergson, this animating faculty of consciousness is echoed in Hulme, but not with perfect fidelity. While Hulme shares Bergson's desire to break certain imposed frames and gain access to a more primary, "motive" level, he is not willing to follow Bergson blindly into territory that smacks of a recuperative reunion with Nature that runs counter to his deep sense of humankind's "original" fallenness from such a union. Whereas in Bergson the act of consciousness and the organisms it "lights up" are part and parcel of a comprehensive, though far from simplistic, evolutionary movement that corresponds to the articulations of an absolute Nature; for Hulme the consciousness's act of organizing does not appear to subsist of anything other than itself. There "is a difficulty in finding a comprehensive scheme of the cosmos," he writes, "because there is none. The cosmos is only organized in parts; the rest is cinders." [S, 220] Thus for Hulme, the organized fruits of consciousness, and in a sense consciousness itself, remain isolated "oases" of constructed order amid a more fundamental world of "cinders".

While Bergson's durée is a rather shadowy synthesis (as he himself puts it) of unity and multiplicity, with neither being privileged, Hulme's cinders obtain only to multiplicity, thus effectively halving the continuum that Bergson sees the intuition of durée operating along:

Some adhere to the point of view of the multiple; they set up as concrete reality the distinct moments of time

which they have reduced to powder; the unity which enables us to call the grains a powder they hold to be much more artificial. Others, on the contrary, set up the unity of duration as concrete reality. They place themselves in the eternal. [IM, 47-8]

Hulme's positing of the cinders at the expense of all unity places him firmly in the first position, which Bergson aligns with empiricism as opposed to the unifying idealism of the other extreme. This truncating of the central doctrine of Bergsonism on Hulme's part will have a grave impact on a poetics which emphasizes sense-data and materiality in general. As Bergson points out, durée in this direction advances

towards a more and more attenuated duration, the pulsations of which, being more rapid than ours, and dividing our simple sensation, dilute its quality into quantity; at the limit would be pure homogeneity, that pure repetition by which we define materiality. [IM, 49]

It is at this extreme end of durée, prior even to the unity of our sensations, that Hulme's cinders arise, themselves possessing no inherent qualities, a field of pure potential awaiting the organizing, valuating activity of human consciousness out of which our "sense" of the material world springs.

Curiously, while Hulme claims that in Bergson the deadened world of mechanistic materialism is reawakened, his own weltanschauung seems to turn the world, or at least the material out of which the world is made, into particles even more lifeless than the mechanists' atoms. Hulme himself acknowledges a debt to atomism when he paradoxically

stresses that "the world is finite (atomism: there are no infinitudes except in art) and that it is yet an infinitude of cinders (there is no finite law encompassing all)." Here Hulme invokes atomism in order to deny any Idealistic flights into the infinite, and then goes one step further in positing a particle so fine that it cannot be caught in the net positive science casts on the flux. Thus it is as incorrect to conceive of Hulme's cinders as isolatable, orderable building-blocks, as it is to see what Hulme refers to as the "general lava flow of cinders" as equivalent to a unified, informing Nature. Indeed, the status of the cinder appears to be that it has no status. "There is an objective world (?), a chaos, a cinder-heap," [S,225] Hulme insists, yet the parenthetical question mark is his, alluding to the fact that the cinder, by definition, is prior to any defining act.

This enigmatic non-status of the cinder is somewhat disconcerting given the weight Hulme himself places on his cinder theory. It does, however, become somewhat less enigmatic when placed beside a perhaps more familiar "particle/non-particle"--Jacques Derrida's trace. A comparison between the two is begged when, in the introduction to his own Cinders--Ned Lukacher's translation of Derrida's Feu la Cendre--Derrida is cited writing that he "would prefer ashes as the better paradigm for what I call

the trace--something that erases itself totally, radically, while presenting itself" and "trace or cinder. These names are as good as any other." Within the fragmented, polyphonic text itself Derrida expands on his fondness for the image of the cinder when he writes, in reference to his own project (the "he" of the passage), that

I have the impression now that the best paradigm for the trace, for him, is not, as some have believed, and he as well, perhaps, the trail of the hunt, the fraying, the furrow in the sand, the wake in the sea, the love of the step for its imprint, but the cinder. [Derrida, Cinders, 43]

Derrida's substitution of 'cinder' for 'trace' is neither as coincidental nor as uncanny as it might appear, for Hulme's cinder and Derrida's trace/cinder share strikingly similar origins and characteristics that make a brief look at the latter beneficial in determining the status of the former.

Arising out of an inversion of what Derrida considers the onto-theological privileging of Being and presence at the expense of the secondary, "fallen" realm of temporality, the trace can perhaps best be understood as a particle or increment of that difference which is the essential characteristic of temporality. Thus, in Speech and Phenomena Derrida writes that

The living present springs forth out of its nonidentity with itself and from the possibility of a retentional trace. It is always already a trace [which] is not an attribute, we cannot say that the self of the living present "primordially is" it. Originary-being must be thought on the basis of the trace, and not the reverse. This archewriting is at work at the origin of sense. Sense being temporal in nature, as Husserl recognized, is never simply present, it is always already engaged



in the "movement" of the trace, that is, in the order of "signification". [Derrida Reader, 26]

The trace, like the cinder at the extreme empirical end of durée, precedes and makes possible not only our sense of a present, and presence in general, but also what Derrida refers to as "originary-being". Derrida often presents this reversal in linguistic terms with the primacy of Being, as transcendental signified, or Logos, being supplanted by the endless chain or web of trace-like signifiers with which, through what Derrida elsewhere refers to as the "trick of writing," the various polarities of Western thought, including Being/non-Being, absence/presence, and interior/exterior, are "put into play".

In a similar fashion, Hulme's cinders, as increments of durée disengaged from the élan vital, are born out of Bergson's own critique of rational science's "stopping" of the flux--a critique that Hulme extends to include Bergson's teleological, vitalistic tendencies as well, resulting in the directionless flux of the cinders. As with the "'movement' of the trace" or differance in Derrida, Hulme's cinders become the pre-conceptual, pre-ontological ground for any subsequent order, including those that would designate the cinders themselves as Nature, reality, or the projection of a unified consciousness. Any unity in the world, indeed, any "world" at all, is seen as a provisional, as opposed to an absolute, construct built up out of, but never beyond, a cindery chaos which in turn replaces the old

Absolute that, Hulme asserts, from now on "is to be described not as perfect, but if existent as essentially imperfect, chaotic, and cinder-like. (Even this view is not ultimate, but merely designed to satisfy temporary human analogies and wants.)" [S,221]

"The trace is nothing," Derrida writes, "it is not an entity, it exceeds the question What is? and contingently makes it possible." [DR, 46] Similarly Hulme emphasizes the "necessity of distinguishing between a vague philosophic statement that 'reality always escapes a system,' and the definite cinder, felt in a religious way and being a criterion of nearly all judgment, philosophic and aesthetic." [S, 243] With what, in the context of this study, may be considered an oblique reference to Kant's third critique, Hulme warns against taking his cinder theory as simply a replacement philosophy. The cinder, "felt in a religious way", as opposed to being thought of conceptually, becomes the unstable, indeterminate ground upon which ensuing judgments, "philosophic and aesthetic" and, one might add, poetic are made.

"All is flux," Hulme declares, "The moralists, the capital letterists, attempt to find a framework outside the flux, a solid bank for the river, a pier rather than a raft. Truth is what helps a particular sect in the general flow." [S,22] It appears that once the cinder is "felt in a religious way," a displacement of our conceptual frameworks

occurs which reveals the contingencies beneath them. While the judgments still get made, and orders constructed (survival depends on it), they are not granted absolute status or transcendent powers. "Pure seeing of the whole process is impossible," Hulme maintains, adding, in a passage that removes the primary condition of Kant's aesthetics, that "little fancies help us along, but we never get pure disinterested intellect." [S,239] Wherever we may look, our needs and desires precede us, denying the possibility of an unmediated apprehension of either things-in-themselves, or of the absolute spirit of which they purportedly partake.

Thus the aesthetic function for Hulme is constructive and pragmatic:<sup>15</sup> "Art creates beauty (not art copies the beauty in nature: beauty does not exist by itself in nature, waiting to be copied, only organized pieces of cinders)." [FS,97] Consequently,

the phenomenon we study is not the immense world in our hand, but certain little observations we make about it. We put these on a table and look at them. We study little chalk marks on a table (chalk because that shows the cindery nature of the division we make) and

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<sup>15</sup>. cf. Patricia Rae's "The Aesthetics of Comfort: Hulme's Pragmatism and Contemporary Criticism" in which she writes that Hulme "recognized the poetic analogy, like the pragmatic truth, to be a construct that not only appeases the readers need to detect some order in the chaos but also keeps his eye steadily trained upon it." [58] As the conditions of Hulme's prairie epiphany and the destabilizing effect of the cinders suggest, the comfort of such appeasement is counter-balanced by considerable discomfort.

create rules near enough for them. [S,237]

Thus the role of the artist, and of the poet, according to Hulme's cinder theory, shifts from the contemplation of the noumenality of things to the observation of phenomena-- themselves observations "written" in chalk in a mediating act of "arche-writing" that precedes and determines the world as we find it.

Not only do Hulme's cinders prefigure Derrida's, they also seem to corroborate de Man's observation [cf. intro] that, in some post-Romantic poetics, Nature, in its fallen sterility, its absence, still exerts a nostalgic influence. Certainly the image of the cinder in Bergson is nostalgic and, from the point of view that demands presence and plenitude, sterile. However, in suppressing (or, rather, extinguishing) the object of this nostalgia, Hulme turns this sterility into the potential necessary to build the house in the first place. In dividing the world into "Two parts: 1--All cinders; 2--the part built up," he is not trying to privilege the "part built up" by turning it into a static position from which an unfulfilled subject, an unhappy consciousness, longs for the fullness of an unattainable object, as in de Man's formulation.

"Forget you are a personality!" was reportedly one of Hulme's favourite rebukes in conversation, [FS,x] and in "Cinders" he explicitly questions his own privileging of the

person:

Refuse World as a unit and take Person (in flight from the word fallacy).

But why person? Why is the line drawn exactly there in the discussion of counter words? [S,233]

Why indeed. Hulme's dislike for "counter words" and the symbolic, conceptual structures composed with them is a product of his general distrust of unities imposed on the flux of experience out of which the cinder, as an increment of difference, emerges as "fundamental". Accordingly, not only do the cinders deny any inherent unity in "objective" nature, they also infiltrate the subject at the level of identity, turning our sense of a unified subject, be it as person, self or ego, into a provisional construct, a wave-pattern in the cinders.

The "eyes, the beauty of the world," Hulme reminds us, "have been organised out of the faeces. Man returns to dust. So does the face of the world to primeval cinders." [S,237] Thus the subject is placed in, rather than above,

a landscape, with occasional oases. So now and then we are moved--at the theatre, action, a love. But mainly deserts of dirt, ash-pits of the cosmos, grass on ash-pits. No universal ego, but a few definite persons gradually built up. [S,225]

Following Bergson, "matter and memory", (ie. object and subject, respectively) having been "gradually built up at the same time," interpenetrate at the crossroads of consciousness and neither one can be separated from the other, for "both are mixed up in a cindery way and we extract them as counters." [S,236]

This "extraction", and the mention of counters, brings us to that aspect of Hulme's cinder theory that has the most direct bearing on his poetics: the "building up"---its mechanism, medium, and the intention or motive (to borrow a Hulmian term) behind it. This is how Hulme describes the process, through the use of a favourite example:

In this ash-pit of cinders, certain ordered routes have been made, thus constituting whatever unity there may be--a kind of manufactured chess-board laid on a cinder-heap. Not a real chess-board impressed on the cinders, but the gossamer world of symbolic communication already spoken of. [S,219]

Apparently Hulme is not so blinded by a desire for "unmediated vision" that he is able to overlook the mediating role of language. Quite the contrary, for the "gossamer web" within which are generated the oppositions, patterns, and conventions by which we structure our world is language--or at least Hulme's version of language:

there is a kind of gossamer web woven between the real things, and by this means the animals communicate. For purposes of communication they invent a symbolic language. Afterwards this language, used to excess, becomes a disease, and we get the curious phenomena of men explaining themselves by means of the gossamer web that connects them. [S,217]

This passage clearly illustrates Hulme resisting an easy one-to-one relationship between "real things" and the words used to refer to them. Indeed, following Bergson, the real things themselves are mediated, "artificially picked out of the general lava flow of cinders" prior to entering the essentially relational "gossamer web" of language, the

"manufactured chessboard laid on a cinder-heap."

The affinity between Hulme's and Derrida's respective projects is further confirmed when Derrida, making use of a similar analogy, writes of

The play of a trace which no longer belongs to the horizon of Being, but whose play transports and encloses the meaning of Being: the play of the trace, or the differance, which has no meaning and is not.

Which does not belong. There is no maintaining, and no depth to, this bottomless chessboard on which Being is put into play. [DR,75]

For both Hulme and Derrida, as "frontier" philosophers, this "play of the trace"--Hulme's "manifestations of the cinders" that the poet must observe--which demarcates the border(s) by which we define our selves, and our being, is of prime importance, as is the configuration of the chessboard and the rules or conventions according to which the "game" is played.

In a passage that directly links his poetics to the generation and articulation of this chessboard of linguistic convention, Hulme observes that "Nature [is] infinite,"

but personality finite, rough, and incomplete. Gradually built up.[...] Poet's mood vague and passes away, indefinable. The poem he makes, selects, builds up, and makes even his own mood more definite to him. Expression builds up personality [...] the creation of his own chessboard. [FS,94]

Elsewhere Hulme accounts for the structure and structuring of his "chessboard" when he writes of "an infinity of analogues, which help us along, and give us a feeling of power over the chaos when we perceive them." [S,233] At the primary symbolic level of the gossamer web these "analogues"

are determined by basic human needs and desires, a view that, as the following passage shows, gives added substance to Hulme's wish to speak of poetry as "one would speak of pigs":

In the tube lift hearing the phrase "fed up," and realising that all our analogies spiritual and intellectual are derived from purely physical acts. Nay more, all attributes of the absolute and the abstract are really nothing more (in so far as they mean anything) but elaborations of simple passions. All poetry is an affair of the body--that is, to be real it must affect the body. [S. 242]

For Hulme, any system, and particularly any poetics, that removes itself from this primary level is unacceptable, as is the case when he calls into question "the treatment of the soul as the central part of the nominalist position. Their habit of regarding it as a kind of round counter all red, which survives whole in all its redness and roundness...a counter-like distinct separate entity, just as word itself is." [S.221]

Although we cannot avoid entering the gossamer web (even the animals are always already there) of symbolic language, Hulme attempts to preempt the hegemony of the logos, as the Word, by regarding it as a word, another counter among many. Language, while maintaining a pragmatic currency, is never allowed any transcendental leeway, for that is to remove it from its proximity to the cinders. "In an organised city," we are warned, "it is not easy to see the cinder element of earth--all is banished. But it is easy to see it psychologically. What the Nominalists call



the grit in the machine, I call the fundamental element of the machine." [S,226] No matter how secure the positions built with the counters of symbolic language may appear, they are always infiltrated by Hulme's trace-like particles of indeterminacy, chaos, and difference--the "cinder element of earth" in which his "classical poet" remains "mixed up". Indeed, if the cinder is to be located at all, Hulme suggests that it is here, within the constructs of symbolic language, that it makes its presence felt--a presence that is actually a difference.

It would appear that Hulme's weltanschauung, in stressing that "only in the fact of consciousness is there a unity in the world" [S,222] and then denying the subject any lasting unity, results in an extreme anti-foundationalism that would rival similar "positions" taken up more recently. Hulme, however, hesitates when it comes to embracing the full chaotic implications of his "cinder principle" as he wonders whether the "floating heroic world (built up, of moments) and the cindery reality--can they be made to correspond to some fundamental constitution of the world?" [S,220] How, one asks, can this question be asked when the cinders have already been posited as fundamental? Admittedly, Hulme, in asking the above question, is primarily concerned with denying the veracity of the various doctrines of Egoism that, in his mind, put us "in danger of forgetting that the

world does really exist." But what then is the status of our "little observations" within the "cindery reality" and, by extension, the poems that presumably record them? How "real" can they be?

Hulme balks at endorsing the relativistic nihilism that these questions invite, seeing such an attitude as a product of disengaged, negational Reason that not only "thinks" itself out of the cinders, but that thinks the world away as well. Hulme's own deep-rooted skepticism denies the negative, intelligence-serving weltanschauung that skepticism can lead to; yet it also, somewhat ironically, places him firmly inside his house in the cinders as he admits that

We live in a room, of course, but the great question for philosophy is: how far have we decorated the room, and how far was it made before we came? Did we merely decorate the room, or did we make it from chaos? The laws of nature that we certainly do find--what are they? [S.226]

These questions remain unanswered, as once again we find ourselves confronted by a form of limitation. Not, as in the Hulmian epiphany, in the form of a fallenness from the ascendancy of human Reason that places the house in the cinders in the first place; but, conversely, in the inability to fully leave the house. While insisting on the fundamentalness of his cinders, Hulme also insists that "the fundamental cinders--primeval chaos--the dream of impossible chaos" is not accessible to the human intellect which, as Derrida would put it, is always already engaged in the "part

built-up"--arche-written on the cinders, with the cinders:

Unity is made in the world by drawing squares over it.  
We are able to get along these at any rate--cf. railway  
line in desert. (Always the elusive as seen in maps.  
Ad infinitum)

The squares include cinders--always cinders.  
No unity of laws, but merely the sorting  
machine. [S,223]

We have clearly come a long way from Kant's dominion of Reason or Shelley's fading, yet still cosmos-illuminating, coal when the rational mind is displaced to the point of being considered a finite "sorting machine" among the manifold. Some might argue that Hulme has fallen into the same sort of reductionism that he lambasts positive scientism for promoting. But this is not the case, for consciousness, as the very act of sorting and selecting at the threshold, retains a privileged, if decentred, status, as the following pivotal passage suggests:

There are moments when the tip of one's finger seems raw. In the contact of it and the world there seems a strange difference. The spirit lives on that tip and is thrown on the rough cinders of the world. All philosophy depends on that--the state of the tip of the finger.

When Aphra had touched, even lightly, the rough wood, this wood seemed to cling to his finger, to draw itself backward and forward along it. The spirit returned again and again, as though fascinated, to the luxurious torture of the finger. [S,236-7]

This passage is of interest for various reasons, not the least of which is that it contains one of the few allusions to Aphra, the central character of the novel that "Cinders" was to become, to survive Herbert Read's editorship. It

also shows that Hulme, like Worringer, is concerned with the relationship that we strike with the world as we find and construct it. Moving away from Hulme's philosophical concerns, the remainder of my study will focus on the demands articulating this "strange difference" places on Hulme's poetics and poetic writing in general as the "sorting machine" turns writing machine upon the poetic field of action.

## CHAPTER THREE

### "THE CURVE OF THE THING": THE HULMIAN IMAGE

I had an image of her, but that is not the same thing.  
An image is the stop the mind makes between  
uncertainties.

--Djuna Barnes, Nightwood

Any discussion of Hulme's poetics inevitably leads to the image and, in a broader sense, Imagism. The poet, Hulme insists, "has to mould images, a kind of spiritual clay, into definite shapes" through which poetry may achieve its "great aim"-- "accurate, precise and definite description.' [S.132] This emphasis on description, and the degree of accuracy with which Hulme believes it may be accomplished in language, appears to support those who see him as promoting a photo-realistic poetics of presence that attempts to achieve direct, unmediated contact with external objects. Upon closer inspection of Hulme's imagistic method, however, the object of poetic description and the "spiritual clay" with which the poem is made--like the cinders beneath them--resist the categories upon which such readings depend.

In "Romanticism and Classicism" Hulme elaborates on the descriptive function of poetry and the exactitude it demands with the aid of the following example:

You know what I call architect's curves--flat pieces of wood with all different kinds of curvature. By a suitable selection from these you can draw approximately any curve you like. The artist I take to be the man who simply can't bear the idea of that 'approximately.' He will get the exact curve of what

he sees whether it be an object or an idea in the mind. [S,132]

As the last sentence suggests, Hulme's object of description, though "seen", is not necessarily an object in exterior reality, let alone the preferred natural object of Romanticism. It can either be an "object" or an "idea," and, according to Hulme's phrasing, they could both be "in the mind." This degree of indeterminacy is maintained in the first Imagist tenet as presented by F.S. Flint in 1913: "Direct treatment of the `thing`, whether subjective or objective"; [Jones, Peter Austin, Imagist Poetry, 129] as well as in Ezra Pound's insistence that "the natural object is always the adequate symbol" [131]--a dictum that Pound employs to warn against mixing concrete and abstract terms, yet, in conflating natural objects and symbols, appears to be doing just that.

Where then does one place Hulme's "thing" and, by extension, the poem that his poetics envisages in relation to the objects of sense-perception that it apparently is to describe? In order to answer this question it is necessary to turn to the relationship between Hulme's poetics and Bergsonian intuition. "Images in verse," Hulme writes, "are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language" and poetry itself is

not a counter language, but a visual concrete one. It is a compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily. It always endeavors to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract

process. [S,134]

Here Hulme explicitly links his poetics to Bergsonian intuition, while at the same time distancing it as a "compromise for a language of intuition"--a compromise that is unavoidable, for Bergsonian intuition, as a pre-conceptual mode of cognition, has no language.

In a passage that would appear to make him, rather than Hulme, the theorist of Imagism, Bergson offers a way around intuition's essential silence through the image:

Now the image has at least this advantage, that it keeps us in the concrete. No image can replace the intuition of duration, but many diverse images, borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a direct intuition to be seized. [IM,16]

Not only does this passage contain the kernel of what will become Hulme's imagistic method of poetic construction, it also supplies important information concerning the status of the image and physical things within that method. In the first place, the image is not the object of intuition, nor is it capable of substituting for it. The single image possesses limited powers and to speak of it as one would speak of a symbol, for example, is misleading, for it is only through the juxtaposition of two or more images that the imagistic method's consciousness-directing potential is activated.

Secondly, the "physical thing" that the poem is to evoke in the reader is neither the object of intuition, nor

necessarily the object of poetic description. In Bergson physical things, having been "selected" out of the flux of durée according to the exigencies of the practical intellect, are already conceptual. "Not things made, but things in the making" is one of the ways he describes durée, thus placing the object of intuition--ie. durée--prior to external things. This sense of physical reality as apprehended through sense-perception having already been made, or mediated, by the demands of consciousness is carried over by Hulme in his cinder theory. While poetry may endeavour to "make you continuously see a physical thing," it is doubtful that Hulme would forget that the "compromise for a language of intuition" has already been made at the level of perception, let alone linguistic signification. On the contrary, the intuitive, imagistic method as Hulme finds it in Bergson is conceptual (albeit disruptively so), and, despite the image's alleged concreteness, abstract, operating relationally only after the "orders of things" have been established.

We have already seen in the previous chapter that Hulme does not hesitate to deviate from Bergsonism where he sees fit, yet there is little deviation on his part when he writes of a poet "moved by a certain landscape":

he selects from that certain images which, put into juxtaposition in separate lines, serve to suggest and evoke the state he feels.....Two visual images form what one may call a visual chord. They unite to suggest an image which is different to both. [FS,73]



Importantly, this "suggested image" or "visual chord" is not merely the descriptive sum of the two juxtaposed images. While it is still, according to Hulme, an image of sorts, its poetic worth lies in its being essentially different from the two juxtaposed images "borrowed from very different orders of things." This distinction, along with the positioning of the image in Bergson, greatly qualifies the status of mimesis in Hulme's poetics. The "piling-up and juxtaposition of distinct images in different lines" that Hulme advocates is not accomplished with the intention of representing the "landscape" or object in question in its entirety or noumenality. The landscape, once it has supplied the requisite select images, is discarded. Attention turns to the state itself and, ultimately, to the suggestive, affective powers of the poetic construct which operate above (or at least beyond) the level of the individual images in an attempt to direct the reader to Bergson's intuition of durée. Hulme, however, replaces durée with the cinders which do not permit the final, unifying phase of Bergsonian intuition that will express itself in the positing of the élan vital. In keeping with the impetus of his prairie epiphany, he appropriates Bergson's imagistic compromise for intuition proper not in order to reestablish some sort of pantheistic union with external things, but in order to explore the cindery pre-conceptual ground beneath them and to plumb, as Worringer

puts it, "the unfathomable entanglement of all the phenomena of life."

Despite Bergson's, and subsequently Hulme's, attraction to the image due to its concrete, non-conceptual status, the imagistic method engages at a metaphysical, meta-imagistic level that is hardly 'concrete' in the usual sense of the word--but then, neither are the initial images. In Matter and Memory Bergson offers the following definition of the image that helps to situate it in relation to the "things" of sense-perception:

by 'image' we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing,-- an existence placed half-way between the 'thing' and the 'representation.' This conception of matter is simply that of common sense [MM,xi-ii]

As the last sentence indicates, wrapped up in the image is a conception of matter that grounds the radical empiricism of Bergson's philosophy. According to this conception, matter--the stuff (or clay) of all experience--is, in Bergson's words, an interpenetrating "aggregate of 'images'" which precedes such philosophical schisms as subject/object and appearance/reality. "For common sense," Bergson maintains, "the object exists in itself, and, on the other hand, the object is, in itself, pictorial, as we perceive it: image it is, but a self-existing image." [MM,xii] The image is more than the idealist's representation in that it has not been separated from the objects of what Bergson calls common

sense; yet it is less than the realist's things "out there" because it cannot be disengaged from the apperceptive activity either. In Bergson matter and memory (ie. consciousness), having been "built up" at the same time, are inseparable. At this pre-linguistic level, the level of what Derrida might call arche-writing, where our sense of the world gets "written," the image, as "spiritual" rather than physical clay, can be considered the basic unit of phenomenality, a sensory trace (or cinder) that retains the impression of some thing prior to it, yet, as primary material, is always already engaged in consciousness's mediated and mediating world-building. Yet this is not the level at which the reader, or writer, encounters the image. It is the image in language that most concerns us, and which most concerns Hulme as well:

It is no mere matter of carefulness; you have to use language, and language is by its very nature a communal thing; that is, it expresses never the exact thing but a compromise--that which is common to you, me and everybody. But each man sees a little differently, and to get out clearly and exactly what he does see, he must have a terrific struggle with language, whether it be with words or the technique of other arts. [S.132]

This "terrific struggle" leads Hulme to embrace the image as a way of avoiding "conventional language in order to get the exact curve of the thing," [S.137] despite his awareness that whatever the result, it will still be a compromise. In the following example he gives us an idea of what, for him, constitutes an image in language:

[Poetry] chooses fresh epithets and fresh metaphors,

not so much because they are new, and we are tired of the old, but because the old cease to convey a physical thing and become abstract counters. A poet says a ship 'coursed the seas' to get a physical image, instead of the counter word 'sailed.' Visual meanings can only be transferred by the new bowl of metaphor; prose is an old pot that lets them leak out. [S,135]

While the physical status of "coursed the seas" is debatable, what is pertinent is that for Hulme the image is essentially rhetorical and relational. Rather than being a descriptive, mimetic, or representational device that attempts to convey sense-perceptions intact to the reader, it functions interpretively, relating the object in question to a second, "concrete" or "physical" term that results in a visual, as opposed to an abstract or conceptual, meaning.

Importantly, the linguistic image "coursed the seas" in the above example is not to be confused with the actual ship "sailing." Instead, its worth as a physical image lies in its supplying the reader with a new way of "seeing," or interpreting, the phenomenon in question as well as the verb 'to sail' that has become the conventional "counter" for that phenomenon. As such, it operates at the level of what Charles S. Peirce calls the interpretant.

Himself using an example of a ship on the sea that the reader does not see, but about which is told, "That vessel there carries no freight at all, but only passengers," Peirce writes that "the sentence as a whole has, for the person supposed, no other Object than that with which it finds him already acquainted." [Peirce, 101] This

acquaintanceship is the interpretant, for "a sign is something A, which denotes some fact or object, B, to some interpretant thought, C" [93] with C, the interpretant, functioning in each reader's mind according to that reader's previous experience of both A and B to connect them and to give that connection meaning. One is reminded of the primary analogies with which the gossamer web of language is woven and imprinted on the cinders. It is at this level, where each individual's experience of the world in language and of language in the world coincides, that Hulme would have poetic language operate, rather than that of "abstract counters" and ornamental rhetoric, or of direct unmediated contact.

Peirce acknowledges that the interpretant takes the form of an "equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign," [99] and therefore may be what Hulme would consider an abstract counter. However, in insisting that the poet use "physical images" that will register as such for the reader, Hulme attempts to keep the level of poetic signification at that of the gossamer web of primary analogies, as he indicates with another frontier reference:

- (i) New phrases made in poetry, tested, and then employed in prose.
- (ii) In poetry they are all glitter and new coruscation, in prose useful and not noticed.
- (iii) Prose a museum where all the old weapons of poetry kept.
- (iv) Poetry always the advance guard of language. The process of language is the absorption of new analogies. (Scout, so nearest to the flux and real basic condition of life.) [FS,81]

The new analogies may be "nearest to the flux and real basic condition of life", but neither unmediatedly nor disinterestedly so. In accordance with the cinder theory, Hulme considers them "amplifications of man's appetites", articulations of our physical, emotional, material needs as linguistic creatures within language, for "the ultimate reality is a circle of persons, i.e., animals who communicate." [S,217]

This emphasis on "motives" ("they are the only rock: physical bases change. They are more than human motives: they are the constitution of the world", he writes in "Cinders") is carried over into the poetics, as is evident in an "extreme case" Hulme presents in "Romanticism and Classicism":

If you are walking behind a woman in the street, you notice the curious way in which the skirt rebounds from her heels. If that peculiar kind of motion becomes of such interest to you that you will search about until you can get the exact epithet which hits it off, there you have the proper esthetic emotion. But it is the zest with which you look at the thing which decides you to make the effort. [S,136]

Here Hulme, in an example that connects poetic desire with physical, sexual desire, emphasises not the object of that desire, but the desire itself, the zest, and the "search" that it initiates without which the "curve of the thing" will not be generated. Rather than describing an object accurately, the poem becomes a vehicle of accurate transcription whereby

the poet is forced to use new analogies, and especially

to construct a plaster model of a thing to express his emotion at the sight of the vision he sees, his wonder and ecstasy [...] without this clay, spatial image, he does not feel he has expressed at all what he sees.  
[FS,78]

According to this schema, the poem, as "plaster model," constructed out of images which, when juxtaposed, form what Hulme calls analogies, is not a model of what the poet sees, but a vehicle of expression for the emotion that the poet experiences "at the sight of the vision that he sees"--the play of his or her own interpretive images as he or she encounters the already mediated sensuous manifold.

Despite the essentially relational and rhetorical form that his linguistic primitivism takes, Hulme's belief in a "visual concrete" mode of linguistic signification that yields "visual meanings" still appears to assume a one-to-one relationship, not necessarily between the words and the things to which they refer, but between words and the images that they are to convey to the reader. The trouble is that language is not suited to this transcriptive process that, given Hulme's notion of thought, would amount to linguistic telepathy:<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>. As Wallace Martin and Patricia Rae have suggested, much of Hulme's thinking on the image, language, and thought was "borrowed," in addition to Bergson, from the work of Th. Ribot, both of whom influenced Symboliste theory as well. In his Evolution of General Ideas, Ribot posits a "concrete type" of reader of which he writes: "the abstract word nearly always evokes an image, vague or precise; usually visual, sometimes muscular. It is not a simple sign, it does not represent the total substitution, it is not dry and

- i) Thought is prior to language and consists in the simultaneous presentation to the mind of two different images.
- ii) Language is only a more or less feeble way of doing this. [FS, 84]

His fictional Aphra may see "each word with an image sticking on to it, never a flat word passed over a board like a counter" [FS,78], but Hulme complains that

the damnable thing is [...] what to me is an entirely physical thing, a real clay before me, moulded, an image, is when used nothing but an expression like 'in so far, etc.' The pity is that all the meaning goes. A word to me is a board with an image or statue on it. When I pass the word, all that goes is the board, the statue remains in my imagination. [FS,81]

Hulme's own struggle with language in fashioning his poetics results from this slippage between the word and the image that forces him to acknowledge that the image in language is itself a sign, or counter. Rather than containing its own meaning, or meaning-yielding interpretant, it only has meaning in relation to the reader's own interpretant, which, according to Peirce, is itself a sign that demands another interpretant, thus initiating a series of significations that never arrives at the object of the sign--the signified.

While insisting that the poet "Always seek the hard, definite, personal word," [S,231] Hulme realizes that any

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finally reduced. It is immediately and spontaneously transformed into a concrete. In fact, the persons of this type think only in images. Words are for them no more than a kind of vehicle, a social instrument or mutual comprehension.[...] The concrete type appears to be the most widely distributed; it obtains almost to exclusion among women, artists, and all who have not the habit of scientific abstraction." [116]



word can only be so personal, that all words are shared and are prior to the personality that wields them. Poetry may very well be the "advanced guard of language", yet it must always be language. Thus, despite its being designed to transgress the habits of language, the poetry he proposes is at the same time necessarily bound to language. "The readers are the people who see things and want them expressed," he writes in a passage that drastically alters the status of both mimesis and expression in his poetics. "The author is the Voice, or the conjuror who does tricks with that curious rope of letters, which is quite different from real passion and sight." [FS,85].

Elsewhere we are asked to regard "each word as a picture, then a succession of pictures," only to be told that

Only the dead skeleton remains. We cut the leaves off. When the tree becomes a mast, the leaves become unnecessary. But now only the thick lines matter, and the accompanying pictures are forgotten. [FS,83]

Realizing that poets deal in words, not trees, and any word, no matter how "physical" or "visual" the interpretive process that it initiates, is first and foremost a written signifier within a shared writing system, Hulme is forced to reassess his privileging of the image, and by extension thought, at the expense of the words that convey the images:

Language does not naturally come with meaning. Ten different ways of forming the same sentence. Any style will do to get the meaning down (without childish effect). There is no inevitable simple style as there ought to be. Language is a cumbrous growth, a compound

of old and new analogies. Does this apply to thought?  
Is there no simple thought, but only styles of thought?  
[FS,84]

As the final questions suggest, despite elsewhere maintaining thought's independence from language, Hulme recognizes that the slippages and contingencies within language are to be found within thought as well. The "difficulty that is found in expressing an idea," he writes, "in making it long, in dwelling on it by means of all kinds of analogy, has its roots in the nature of ideas and thought itself." [FS.91]

In a fall from the pre-lingual presence of "image-thinking," Hulme concludes that, rather than preceding the writing that embodies it, the thought, like the image, arises out of the writing--"the secret generator":

Very often the idea, apart from the analogy or metaphor which clothes it, has no existence. That is, by a subtle combination of allusions we have artificially built up in us an idea, which apart from these, cannot be got at. As if a man took us on a rocky path and said look--and we saw the view. i.e. the analogy is the thing, not merely decoration. i.e. there is no such thing as. [FS,83]

Neither descriptive, nor transcriptive, poetic writing becomes an act of inscription upon the gossamer web of language that, in a very real sense, is the curve of the thing:

A cindery thing done, not a pure thought made manifest in some counter-like way. The idea is nothing: it is the holding onto the idea, through the absolutely transforming influence of putting it into definiteness. The holding on through waves. [FS,80]

Even without taking into account the mediated status of the

image, the disruptive function of the imagistic method, and the rhetorical nature of Hulme's linguistic primitivism, this awareness of the "absolutely transformative influence" of language alone contradicts those readings that depict him as proposing a linguistically naive poetics of unmediated vision.<sup>17</sup>

While the lack of chronology in the edited notebooks makes it difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct the development of his thought, Hulme himself acknowledges, in light of his growing awareness of the "absolutely transformative" role of language, the need to re-formulate the process whereby so-called pre-lingual experience is incorporated into poetry:

It was formerly my idea that a poem was made somewhat as follows: The poet, in common with many other people, occasionally experienced emotions which strangely moved him...[and]...tried to find new images to express what he felt. These lines and vague collections of words he gradually built up into the poems. But this I now see to be wrong; the very act of trying to find a form to fit the separate phrases into, itself leads to the creation of new images hitherto not felt by the poet. In a sense the poetry writes itself. [FS,95]

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<sup>17</sup>. One critic who does not read Hulme as being linguistically naive is Murray Krieger, who, in 1953, observes that it is precisely Hulme's sensitivity to the "reality" of language that marks a break from Romantic theories of poetry: "But Hulme does not allow these intuitions to take place in a vacuum: he is anti-romanticist enough not to believe in the self-sufficiency of the mind. Not only do intuitions take linguistic form, he claims, but they are dependent upon language." As such, they cannot rightly be called "intuitions" in the Bergsonian sense.

Emphasis shifts from the recording of pre-lingual experience to the act of writing and its essentially relational, differential nature. Rather than referring to something prior to or beyond language, the poem becomes

something to which, when for a surging moment we have a feeling (really the cinders drunk for a minute) we can refer it. Literature as the building-up of this state of reference. [FS,90]

Thus, poetic writing does not function vertically, pointing to some signified object below, or idea above, but horizontally, within the play of the signifiers and of images, and the new "state of reference" they inscribe upon the gossamer web of language within which we are all suspended.

This shift is a product of Hulme's own struggle with language and the realization that reference is made, constructive and mediating, instead of being the passive recording of pre-existent data. "Never, never, never a simple statement", he insists in a particularly provocative passage. "It has no effect. Always must have analogies, which make an other-world through-the-glass effect, which is what I want." [FS,87] The empiricist in Hulme writes of the poem as a lens, but, importantly, not one ground with accurate resolution in mind. Instead, the analogies that are formed from the juxtaposition of two or more images result in a suggestive, distortive refraction that highlights the "otherness" of the world on which the poem is trained as well as the refractive function of the poem

itself as a linguistic construct. Indeed, according to Hulme's phrasing, the refractive analogies precede the effect they make, thus challenging the priority of the object. Moreover, the "glass" of Hulme's analogy can, of course, also be a looking glass in which the refractive, transformative function of the poem becomes reflective, revealing the subject literally writing or inscribing itself into (or onto) the "picture". The poem becomes a mirror in which we see ourselves imprinted on the cinders in the constructions of orders and patterns, of "things" that have meaning, function, and worth in relation to us and in relation to other "things".

Essentially disruptive, the juxtapositional method that Hulme proposes does not function to reaffirm or reify an assumed reality, but to break the habits of mind, and of language, that maintain what is often taken as unmediated reality. "Poetry," Hulme writes, "is neither more nor less than a mosaic of words, so great exactness required for each one." [FS,84] The relationship between this "mosaic of words" and any external thing that it appears to depict, as well as any idea or thought that it could be said to express, becomes far less important than the relationships between the different tiles--the images and the words--that make up the mosaic.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EXTENDED CLAY: THE POEM IN THE CINDERS/ CONCLUSION

it flashing more than a wing,  
than any old romantic thing,  
than memory, than place,  
than anything other than that which you carry  
--Charles Olson, The Maximus Poems

In "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley", Ezra Pound, looking back on his "life and contacts" in London,<sup>18</sup> writes that

The "age demanded" chiefly a mold in plaster,  
Made with no loss of time,  
A prose kinema, not, not assuredly, alabaster  
Or the "sculpture" of rhyme.

The reaction against the rarefied "alabaster" closed verse forms of the day; the attempt to consider the poem in spatial, sculptorial terms without eliminating, as in the mathematical time-dimension of Kant, the kinetic dimension of durée; and the insistence on the visual effect of juxtaposed images resulting in an almost cinematic poetry all point to Hulme. Yet the "prose kinema" Hulme envisages, as the preceding chapter's plotting of the "curve of the thing" suggests, would be no ordinary documentary or realist piece seeking (or assuming) an objective external reality.

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<sup>18</sup>. The actual nature of the Hulme/Pound relationship has remained unclear due to the vested interests of those doing the reporting, including Pound himself. What is of more interest is the relationship between Hulme's proto-Imagism as presented in this study and the Imagism that Pound practiced and promoted--a relationship that will have to wait for a future study.

Rather, the poem becomes the site of that "strange difference", the film or membrane of language being altered, recombined, and, ideally, generated by the desires, needs, and situatedness, both physical and cultural, but above all linguistic, of the writer.

While Hulme repeatedly refers to the image in both visual and spatial terms, the poetic sculpture, made up of the "carefully selected" and placed images that "should exhaust" the reader, is not a realistic representation. On the contrary, it is primarily an effective, expressive vehicle that does not contradict his so-called "late" art criticism:

As far as the artist is creative he is not bound down by the accidental relations of the elements actually found in nature, but extracts, distorts, and utilises them as a means of expression, and not as a means of interpreting nature....Both realism and abstraction, then, can only be engendered out of nature, but while the first's idea of living seems to be that of hanging on to its progenitor, the second cuts its umbilical cord. [FS,128]

Here, in a 1914 essay on modern art, Hulme appears to be reconsidering the aesthetics behind his 1912 position that the "great aim of poetry" is "exact and precise description." However, the realism that Hulme is moving away from in his art criticism is not to be confused with a straightforward, mimetic realism of the type that de Man and Waters would have us believe. Following Worringer's dismissal of the merely mimetic in art and insistence that all art is essentially expressive, Hulme is not advocating a

mimetic "fusion" of perception and imagination that effaces the expressive, as well as rhetorical, function of poetic language.

Although Hulme's insistence on the generative role of nature shows him unwilling to give up entirely the ghost of an informing nature, his apparent readiness to cut the "umbilical cord" that would connect the art object to natural object as grounded source or origin (assumed or not) shows him doing precisely what de Man calls for: questioning the "priority of the natural object." Given the dating of "Cinders" and "Notes on Language and Style", this questioning was well underway by the time Hulme first gave the "Lecture on Modern Poetry" in 1908.

Hulme's poet is not tied to the exactitude of description, but of construction. Accordingly, it is not nature that the poet is investigating, but the construction of nature, and of experience--the observing of the observations that we make in the cinders as opposed to the observing and "fixing" in poetic language of any inherent, absolute order or "thing" that the cinder theory denies. Already at the level of our perceptual engagement in the cinders--Bergson's "aggregate of images" and Hulme's "spiritual clay"--the mediating plastic imagination is at work, constructing and modifying phenomenality prior to its being handed over to consciousness. Thus the Hulmian poem, as "extended clay",



is not to be considered a seamless extension of an unmediated vision, but as a site of linguistic mediation--the mapping of the world in, rather than prior to, language.

This is not to say that Hulme, in insisting on the visual affectiveness of the poem and the "life-affirming" direct contact that such affect transmits to the reader, does not invite those readings that, following Kermode, have resulted in a soft "Romantic Imagism". However, in limiting that same direct contact to the mediated and mediating "gossamer web" of signifiers upon which our symbolic structures are built and reified, Hulme undermines those same readings. At the same time he opens the door to applications of his poetics that are suggested in his writings without always being fully explored by either himself or his readers.

In keeping with Hulme's desire to speak of poetry as one would speak of pigs, that is, at the level of form, technique, and function, the logical place to begin an assessment of the implications of his placing the poem in the cinders is with the images themselves, where writing and reading meet, on the page. What, one asks, is the rhetorical mechanism of the "effect" produced by Hulme's "analogies"--the "visual chords" at the core of his proposed technique--and what, by extension, are the status and characteristics of the poem as analogous structure (or sculpture)? To what, given the anti-foundational cinder

theory, is it analogous?

To reiterate, the images that constitute the poem, and the individual words that constitute the images, do not function as a descriptive catalogue of either a static, self-contained object, or of one particular emotional response to an object or experience. "Borrowed from different orders of things," different contexts, different discourses, the images form a "visual chord" because they are different, forcing the reader to form new associations, to see new, or hidden, relationships between not merely the images, but the "orders" from which they are borrowed. The visual chord, and the poem made up of the interpenetrating images, is therefore not mimetic, but a disruption and manipulation of the mimetic function of language.

Thus the poem beginning "At night!/ All terror's in that", which I have already looked at in reference to Hulme's poetic impetus, quickly moves from the generality of "night" and "all terror" to the "branches of the dead tree", but not for the purposes of a descriptive cataloguing. The particularity and objectivity of the tree "on the hill's edge" become secondary once abutted to the more subjectively impressionistic "Dark veins diseased,/ On the dead white body of the sky" which itself, as a visual chord, is attenuated by the allusive "tearing iron hook/ Of pitiless Mara" which follows it. Utilizing the imagistic technique, the piece consists of a series of stacked images that, being

selected from different orders of signification, function to keep the reader from forming an objective "picture" of the "thing" in question, forcing him or her to focus on the relationships and progressions between the images themselves rather than any that could be posited between the poem as a whole and exterior reality.

Not only does the juxtapositional, imagistic method disrupt the descriptive function of poetic language, it has a similar effect at the figurative/semantic level, as the above piece illustrates. "At night!/ All terror's in that." In what, exactly? "That" may refer to the actual night, or to the connotatively charged, verbal image "At night!" and the emotional response it triggers, as language, in the linguistically conditioned reader--a reading, supported by Hulme's phrasing and punctuation, that posits linguistic mediation itself as the poem's mise-en-scene. While the two-line image--"Branches of the dead tree,/Silhouetted on the hill's edge"--that follows appears to operate at the level of particular description, the next image--"Dark veins diseased,/On the dead white body of the sky"--transforms the former image into a metaphoric vehicle in search of a tenor. The rhetorical indeterminacy of the progression is amplified considerably when "The tearing iron hook of pitiless Mara" is added to the expanding equation without warning, explanation, or relational conjunction. An allusion to the failed temptation and subsequent assault of the Gautama

Buddha by Mara, the Lord of the Senses, this "image" shows the associative range of Hulme's juxtapositional method, as well as its intertextual potential.<sup>19</sup> Here Hulme makes the move from the image as an increment of perception (mediated or not) to the image as increment of language--a move that will have considerable bearing on the post-Imagistic poetics of Pound, William Carlos Williams, Charles Olson, and others.

The effect of the next image is even more jarring. A predicate in search of a subject (Mara? with his tree-cum-vein-cum-hook? Or the perceiving subject?), "Handling soft clouds in insurrection" shifts associatively from the intertext of world literature back to the now mythologized prairie night and the equally disjunctive final image:

Brand of the obscene gods  
On their flying cattle,  
Roaming the sky prairie.

Thus the poem can be considered a succession of varying images that function as terms of metaphors that are never

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<sup>19</sup>. Hulme's use of Mara demands attention in relation to his prairie epiphany. Mara, the Buddhist Lord of the Senses, and, by extension, of the sensuous manifold and temporality, tempts Gautama as he sits under a Bodhi tree: "Mara then assembled his terrifying army of hideous demons and evil spirits who released a volley of arrows, missiles, and deadly weapons on Gautama as he sat, peaceful and calm, in his meditations; but, instead of piercing the body of Gautama, these weapons turned back, and struck the demons who aimed them. Tired and defeated, Mara and his hosts fled in confusion and they left Gautama, in peace under the Bodhi tree, surrounded by perfect stillness, and by a heavenly light." [Shakuntala Masani, 57] Unlike the Buddha's, Hulme's epiphany reveals without transcending the realm of Mara.

allowed to fully form---a series of mixed metaphoric vehicles, each deferring to the next, with the addition of each new image altering the poem in toto.

In reducing connectives and emphasizing paratactic juxtaposition, Hulme's visual chords are designed to remain at the level of first relations, of analogy, thereby resisting what de Man describes in the essay "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric" as "the totalizing power of metaphor as it moves from analogy to identity, from simile to symbol and to a higher order of truth." [RR,248] The movement from image to image, term to term, is one of associative deferral rather than figurative ascendancy, resulting in a form of pre-metaphorical rhetorical activity that Laszlo Géfin makes the core of the ideogrammic method of the Pound-Williams axis of Modernist and post-Modernist poetry:

For Pound, the setting side by side, without copulas, of verbal pictures will perforce establish relationships between the units juxtaposed. Such juxtapositions he called images. The image is the basic form of ideogrammic composition; it is not simply a visual impression but a union of particulars transposed onto the conceptual plane. [Géfin,xii]

While Ernest Fenollosa emphasizes the essential metaphoricity of such a method, Géfin shows that the rhetorical mechanism triggered by the juxtapositions lacks the conceptual structure of the syllogistic metaphor, whose guiding middle term initiates the progression that de Man sees ending in the positing of the anthropomorphic

symbol.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, Hulme's proposed method results in the construction of a "conceptual plane" that, while necessarily "immaterial" and relational, is not organized or governed by a central, predetermined concept or idea, but arises out of the relationships between the "'material' images" on hand.

It is precisely this resistance to the structuring tendencies of standard figurative usage that Hulme makes one of the criteria of "modern" verse. As he puts it,

there are, roughly speaking, two methods of communication, a direct, and a conventional language. The direct language is poetry, it is direct because it deals in images. The indirect language is prose, because it uses images that have died and become figures of speech... [W]hile one arrests your mind all the time with a picture, the other allows the mind to run along with the least possible effort to a conclusion. [FS,74]

While Hulme here writes of poetic language as "direct", the form of communication it uses is not direct in the sense that an idea or perception gets directly handed over to the reader. Its directness is the result of the poem

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<sup>20</sup>. "Such metaphoric juxtapositions," writes Géfin, "evinced a reticence on the part of the poet, an unwillingness to tamper with reality. The form extends from an attitude which does not seek to appropriate nature but to explore it, which sees the human being as a participant in natural processes rather than some kind of corona naturae." [21] While the juxtapositional method of both Hulme and Pound avoids the anthropomorphic totalizations of the symbol, the equating of the poem, or any writing, with "natural processes" is highly problematic. As de Man observes, "Critics who speak of a "happy relationship" between matter and consciousness fail to realize that the very fact that the relationship has to be established within the medium of language indicates that it does not exist in actuality." [RR,8]

"arresting" such a process and thereby remaining at the level of signifiers, or images, and not that of signifieds. The "conceptual plane" initiates an interpretive process that, due to its pre-figurative design, does not arrive at a predetermined destination either below or above its own "reality". The resulting materiality of the poem is the materiality of language divorced or disengaged from its usual ideological and/or pragmatic duties, be they discursive or descriptive, with Hulme's poetic method being designed not only to distort any "reality effect", but also to resist "the fallacy that language is logical, or that meaning is. Phrases have meaning for no reason, cf. with nature of truth." [FS,83]

As the cinder theory shows us, the "nature of truth" for Hulme is not static, nor transcendent, but provisional, a floating raft as opposed to a pier:

The truth is that there are no ultimate principles, upon which the whole of knowledge can be built once and forever as upon a rock. But there are an infinity of analogues, which help us along, and give us a feeling of power over the chaos when we perceive them. [S,234]

The analogues, which for Hulme supply the material of thought and of poetry, form what de Man refers to as the "partial totalizations" that are the result of the umbilicus connecting the finite, sensuous realm to the transcendental infinite being severed as it is in Hulme's prairie epiphany. One of the numerous implications of this severance, which, as mentioned in the introduction, Shusterman uses to align

Hulme with more recent post-structuralists, is that the poem is not to function as a transparent conduit through which the reader may hear an inspired voice speaking the truths of the Logos. Hulme's anti-phonologocentrism is apparent when he writes that

This new verse resembles sculpture rather than music: it appeals to the eye rather than to the ear. It has to mould images, a kind of spiritual clay, into definite shapes....It builds up a plastic image which it hands over to the reader, whereas the old art endeavoured to influence him physically by the hypnotic effect of the rhythm. [FS,75]

The "plastic image", being built up in writing and read as writing, has little use for the originally mnemonic elements of prosody that, as such, function to obscure or efface the poem as writing. The "real solid leather" of poetic writing is the image qua image, which cannot be disengaged from what Pound would call its phanopoeic effect--the image it casts in the mind, affectively--nor from the "rope of letters" which precedes it.

Hulme's attempt to conceive of the poem in spatial, sculptorial terms demands, and has received, some attention. Joseph Frank, for one, uses it to support his concept of spatial form in modern literature in The Widening Gyre. Arguing that "spatial form is the development that Hulme was looking for but did not know how to find," Frank goes on to posit a literary form in which "past and present are apprehended spatially, locked in a timeless unity that, while it may accentuate surface differences, eliminates any



feeling of sequence by the very act of juxtaposition." [60] Given Hulme's modified Bergsonism and general Heraclitean tendencies, it is difficult to imagine him endorsing a form whose aim it is to stop the inherent sequentiality of durée. De Man, too, has trouble with Frank's conception of spatial form and the ahistorical objectivity it grants literary constructions, writing that "much has been lost by ignoring the highly problematic and intentional nature of these entities. Since they are made of invented space and invented time, they cannot possibly be described as if they were natural objects." [CW,110]

Contrary to Frank's extrapolative efforts and de Man's own opinion of early Modernist practices, the Hulmian poem corroborates de Man's reading. The "space" occupied by the plastic image or poetic sculpture is not to be thought of as actual space, but as imaginative space opened in the interpretive grid which precedes actual space and which supplies the framework with which the latter is ordered and prioritized. In manipulating the particulars of "the world existing before us" via the "absolutely transformative" violence of the imagistic method, the poem is to alter our sense of reality. It is not a monument, fixing the essence of a pre-lingual temporal moment in language, but, rather, a verbal construct that activates an interpretive process that, due to the lack of figurative structuring, places the

poem perpetually under construction. <sup>21</sup>

Hulme's poet "must continually be creating new images, and his sincerity may be measured by the number of images", [FS, 75] because the more images that are added to the poem the less static the product. Its effect is more honest or sincere precisely because it does not arrive at a truth, or one static meaning, but instead embodies the truth of a particular linguistic experience. It is not analogous to a static nature beyond itself, but, rather, forms a new "field" of relations---a fracturing and reordering of the reader's interpretive matrix that forces him or her to construct the world, and nature within it, in a new way, for

The field is infinite and herein lies the chance for originality. Here there are some new things under the sun. (Perhaps it would be better to say that there are some new things under the moon, for here is the land preeminently of shadows, fancies and analogies.)  
[S,234]

Given the similarities between Hulme's method and that which Géfin attributes to the Pound-Fennolasa connection, that critic is correct in asserting that "Hulme's ideas certainly constituted a part of the 'new forma mentis' and, as such, represented a vital body of thought 'in the air' to which

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<sup>21</sup>. In the same essay on Frank, de Man supplies a good description of this effect and the status it gives the poem when he writes of "A text that exists in time cannot be projected in a definite and well-rounded shape. It has to be integrated into a continuous interpretation for it is itself a fragment in the incessant interpretation of Being that makes up our history." [114]

all ideogrammic poets could turn for inspiration and clarification." [Géfin,9] Indeed, one of the assertions of this study is that a close reading of Hulme's poetics will help in orienting and understanding the various poetic strategies (be they labelled Modernist, post-Modernist, or post-Romantic) that he both directly and indirectly influenced. While a full investigation of the implications of Hulme's moving the poetic field out of the direct sunlight of perception into the mediated and mediating moonlight of language and writing will have to wait for a more detailed, expansive study, one clarification that can be made at this point is of the relationship between the Hulmian poem and the objects and forces of nature.

Paul de Man, in "The Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image", complains that

literary history has generally labelled "primitivist" "naturalistic," or even pantheistic the first moderns to have put into question, in the language of poetry, the ontological priority of the sensory object. [RR,16]

The "first moderns" being referred to are the early Romantics; yet the observation holds true for the first Modernists as well--or at least for Hulme--with de Man, among others, doing the labelling. Contrary to the reading that de Man encourages and Waters embraces, Hulme's empirical bent and the pressures it places on poetic language are not the products of a nostalgia for the plenitude and presence of the object of nature, but of his distrust of, even repulsion for, all idealized structures

and imposed unities, including Nature itself.

This distrust of what de Man will call aesthetic ideology leads Hulme to actively attack the "literary man" who

deliberately perpetrates a hypocrisy, in that he fits together his own isolated moments of ecstasy (and generally deliberate use of big words without personal meaning attached) and presents them as a picture of higher life, thereby giving old maids a sense of superiority to other people and giving mandarins a chance to talk of "ideals." Then makes attempt to justify himself by inventing the soul and saying that occasionally the lower world gets glimpses of this, and that inferentially he is the medium. [FS,100]

While some might argue (and have argued) that Hulme's answer to the aesthetic ideologues of his day is an equally "idealistic" poetics of presence, we have seen otherwise. The "lower world" of sense-perception, of our finite and mediated engagement in the cinders, while supplying in a round-about way the images of Hulme's method, does not hold the key to a noumenality that accurate description will somehow release.

Indeed, the imagistic method itself, as found in Bergson and that Hulme acknowledges is necessarily a "compromise" for a more immediate intuitive language, is designed to sever the assumed connection between the poem and either the object of perception or rational concepts. This severance results in an increased emphasis on the process of poetic construction as writing at the expense of "pure" perception, as is evident in the following passage from "The German Chronicle":

This first step from the thing clearly "seen" to this almost blind process of development in verse, is the characteristic of the poet, and the step which the merely intelligent man cannot take. He sees 'clearly' and he must construct 'clearly'. This obscure mixture of description and rhythm is one, however, which cannot be constructed by a rational process...Qualities of sincere first-hand observation may be constantly shown, but the result is not a poem. [GC,320]

The poem becomes an act of motive power in the darkness of the cinders that literally generates the "chessboard" upon which the subject is put into play, which, as language, is necessarily connected to other "chessboards." Rather than a vehicle of personal expression for in its own sake, poetic expression can be considered more as a form of personal archeology, the exploration and mapping of the emotive, linguistic matrix which maintains the subject at the level of individual consciousness--what Hulme refers to as the "living method of arranging at once in temporary notebooks" [FS,96], the trace of a consciousness that is only made manifest via that trace as it is "built up" in writing.

In opposition to the "soft" empathetic "Romantic Imagism" that even Géfin, despite his rhetorical insights, appears to subscribe to when he repeatedly writes of the juxtapositional, "ideogrammic" method as somehow aligning the poem with the articulations of a greater Nature, thus becoming the method of choice among a loose tradition of twentieth century poets "in love with things",<sup>22</sup> an

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<sup>22</sup>. "Ideogrammic form is coextensive with this pre-logical and posthumanist outlook, which does not want to control and mar the reality of the living universe, but

alternative "hard" Imagism emerges from Hulme's "modernist lexicon" that takes linguistic mediation as its starting point. The poem is the thing--in writing, a disturbance in the standing wave pattern of existent conventions and ideologies that is an unnatural, unsettling occurrence, for the "standing wave pattern" maintains our constructed sense of a unified Nature.

In keeping with the impulse of Hulme's prairie epiphany, the poem is not the transparent product of an ultimately self-deluding loving contemplation or gazing interaction with the objects of Nature, but something akin to what Roland Barthes has in mind when he writes in Writing Degree Zero that the "verbal gesture here aims at modifying Nature, it is the approach of a demiurge; it is not an attitude of the conscience but an act of coercion."<sup>23</sup> Rather than erasing the defining difference that separates

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accepts and respects it in all its creatures, seeks to live in harmony with all its processes, and wants to love it and enact its mysteries in art." [Géfin, 140]

<sup>23</sup>. Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero. Also of interest in relation to Hulme's poetics of the cinder is Barthes' observation that "modern poetry destroyed relationships in language and reduced discourse to words as static things. This implies a reversal in our knowledge of Nature. The interrupted flow of the new poetic language initiates a discontinuous Nature, which is revealed only piecemeal.[...] Modern poetry is a poetry of the object. In it, Nature becomes a fragmented space, made of objects solitary and terrible, because the links between them are only potential." [49-50] As we have seen, Hulme's poetics contribute considerably to this "reversal" and subsequent "fragmentization".

the human from nature. the poem can be thought of as a necessarily linguistic secretion of human nature within the refractive, generative membrane of language that, from that perspective, is not a membrane separating inner and outer realities, but the "bottomless chessboard" upon which oppositions are put into play.

The individual images, no longer bound to immediate sensory experience, become fragments of affective linguistic material--the "real solid clay" of poetic construction. Such a shift, rather than leading to a limited range of poetic material or the poetic sterility of which de Man writes, opens the field of possible "images" to include those stored in the intertextual "museum" of dead analogies as well as those arising from the poet's own interaction with the cinders. Poetic writing becomes an exploratory endeavour, seeking new experiences in language while at the same time destabilizing the ground upon which our previous structures--or "symbols"--have been built, including our notions concerning poetry itself. At once destructive and constructive, the poem implicates its reader in a double-process which is always underway--the perpetual writing and re-writing of our being, "the permanent humanity, the expression of man freed from his digging, digging for poetry when it is over." [FS, 77]

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The implications of aligning Hulme's poetics with his cinder theory are varied and far-reaching, extending well beyond the necessarily limited scope of this study, which can be considered the basic groundwork for a more thorough investigation into Hulme's poetics of the cinder in relation to Modernist and post-Modernist writing.

Such an investigation would have to begin, as I have, and as Hulme did, with the prairie epiphany--an experience of difference that has left its mark (or brand) on Modernist and post-Modernist practices. As we have seen, in the poetic impulse that Hulme associates with his epiphany, the creative imagination is cut off, dislodged, from its roots in aesthetic ideology. No longer functioning as a "disinterested" bridge between experience and the "higher reality" of ideas, the imagination becomes an instrument of survival amid the sensuous manifold its products can never fully contain or transcend.

The poems generated by such an imagination must and do function differently than those generated by an imagination devoted to transcendence and/or unification. "Courage in the Wild West requires capacities different from those it requires in the city", Hulme reminds us. For the frontier poet, the poet in the cinders, it is the courage to write without the shelter of predetermined structures--be they thematic or formal--in an enterprise that inevitably turns the poem back on itself and its own linguistic materiality.



In marked contrast to the linguistic naivete often associated with Hulme and Imagism in general, a poetics emerges that attempts to remain as close as possible to its generative ground on the "edge" of language, in language. From the work of those early Modernists who have been falsely accused of (and read as) attempting to transmit "unmediated visions"; to the post-Imagistic inter-textual forays of Pound and Olson, among others; to the more recent so-called "language-centered" poetry, the "curve of the thing" continues to be traced. To seek in this poetry presence-yielding, transcendent capabilities is to ask it to perform duties to which it is ill-suited. While it is quite likely that the "poetry degree zero" Hulme envisions on the "advanced guard" of language cannot, due to the very nature of language, be written; the quest for it is not to be adequately explicated by a criticism still functioning within the dispensation Hulme devoted his brief career to overthrowing.

The affinities that I have attempted to show between Hulme's project and those of Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida are not accidental. I believe that in Hulme we not only gain an increased understanding of the formative ground and orientation of much twentieth century poetry; but also certain insights into the relationship between early Modernist theory and recent critical developments that may, ultimately, lead to new critical approaches to that same

poetry. Thus, in sifting through Hulme's cinders, we do not merely uncover the remnants of a bygone chapter of literary history, but the components of the one that is still being written.

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