

IMAGISM IN MAY SINCLAIR'S LIFE AND DEATH OF HARRIETT FREAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper will illustrate how May Sinclair's psychological novel *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1920) shows the influence of Imagism in its poetic texture. Sinclair's articles on Imagist poets like Richard Aldington, F.S. Flint, Ezra Pound and H.D. can be taken as a sign of her awareness and sympathy for the Imagist movement. *Harriett Frean* will be analysed as the epitome of Sinclair's use of Imagist techniques and as a sophisticated example of the degree of elaboration she achieved in her literary career of continuous experimentation. To conclude, a poem-like passage that appears in the last chapter of *Harriett Frean* will be presented as an example of the condensation and intensification of the Imagist techniques used by Sinclair.

This paper will illustrate in which ways May Sinclair's psychological novel *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1920) shows the influence of Imagism. This literary movement had its origins in the U.S. in the early 1900s and was soon accepted in England, where it had a wide influence. A brief analysis of Imagist poetry and its theoretical formulations will enable us to identify the influence of this poetic doctrine on *Harriett Frean*. Imagism refers to the theoretical principles and practice of a group of poets who, between 1912 and 1917, rebelled against what they saw as the careless technique of much nineteenth-century verse. Imagism meant a special attitude towards the nature and function of poetry. In the spring of 1912, Ezra Pound discovered the work of Hilda Doolittle and Richard Aldington and, after studying some of their poems, he announced to them that they were *Imagistes*. By 1914 Pound was explaining Imagism in terms that involved the ideogram. Drawing a parallel between Chinese and Ima-

gist poetry he defined the former as “a verbal medium consisting largely of semi-pictorial appeals to the eye”⁽¹⁾. Some of the Imagist principles formulated by F.S. Flint were: “1. Direct treatment of the “thing,” whether subjective or objective. 2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation. 3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome”⁽²⁾.

In “A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste” Flint defines the Image as “that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time”⁽³⁾. For him concreteness was strongly demanded against the dangers of abstraction. In 1915 Amy Lowell published an anthology called *Some Imagist Poets* that contained more principles of this poetic doctrine: “1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the *exact* word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word. 2. To create new rhythms —as the expression of new moods— and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. [...] In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea. 3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of a subject. [...] 4. To present an image (hence the name: “Imagist”) [...] 5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite. 6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is the very essence of poetry.”

Richard Aldington, like Pound, placed considerable emphasis on the kind of poetic language defended by Imagism. He said that all great poetry was exact and did not contain “portentous adjectives and idiotic similes.” For him, Imagist poets should use as few adjectives as possible and they should consider that syntax or vocabulary unsuitable to prose had no place in poetry. Finally, Aldington shared Pound's admiration for the principle of “hardness” in poetry.

Some articles written by May Sinclair on Imagist poets like Richard Aldington, F.S. Flint, Ezra Pound and, especially, H.D. reveal Sinclair's awareness and sympathy for the Imagist movement. In these articles Sinclair defends the Imagist poets against criticism and shows a sympathetic attitude towards their principles, that she sees guided by Romantic doctrines. Thus, for her, “Wordsworth's aim and the Imagists' is to restore the innocence of memory as Gauguin restored the ‘innocence of the eye.’ “ She highlights Flint's decisive and final break with

(1) Pound, Ezra. “The Renaissance”. *Poetry*. 5 (1915). Quoted by Coffman, Stanley K. *Imagism. A Chapter for the history of Modern Poetry*. New York: Octagon, 1977, 157.

(2) Flint, F.S. “Imagism”. *Poetry*. 1 (1913): 199. Quoted by Coffman, Stanley K. *Imagism. A Chapter for the history of Modern Poetry*. New York: Octagon, 1977, 9.

(3) Flint, F.S. “A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste”. *Poetry*. 1 (1913): 200-01. Quoted by Coffman, Stanley K. *Imagism. A Chapter for the history of Modern Poetry*. New York: Octagon, 1977, 10.

tradition and the effectiveness of his *vers libre* (4). She also compares Aldington to a Romantic poet: "Richard Aldington is possessed by the sense of beauty, the desire of beauty, the absolute emotion, as no single poet since Shelley has been possessed, with the solitary exception of H.D." (5). Finally, in another of these articles dedicated to Imagist poets, Sinclair praises Ezra Pound for his discovery of the old literatures of China and Japan and the "clearness", "vividness", "precision" and "concentration" that result from their influence (6).

Sinclair's special preference for H.D. among the group of Imagist poets makes it essential to look closely at the opinions she expresses on this poet's work in order to understand the ways in which *Harriett Frean* could be influenced by her Imagist techniques. H.D. searched for the singing line of a pure lyric and for the truth that was behind associations without logical connection. She preferred natural speech rhythms to traditional artificial ones (7). Her poems reveal her gift for concise and direct visual description. She frequently used a natural object to stand for a human mood or an emotion in the manner of the Imagist poets. Amy Lowell defined H.D.'s short concentrated poems as "fragile as shells, and as transparent, but their modelling [...] as carefully done as that of a statue of Parian marble." She considered them "exquisite cameos and intaglios" and highlighted their "bordering on preciousity" and their "rare and finely-wrought beauty" (8). It is extremely revealing that these appreciations of H.D.'s poems as careful pieces of workmanship are parallel to similar judgements of *Harriett Frean* in some reviews that will be considered below. H.D.'s "purity and hardness and coldness" were praised by Joseph Riddel, who considered her work "a world of stark, pristine beauty" (9). Sinclair considered H.D. "the first, the perfect Imagist." Her description of H.D.'s Imagist poems in her article "The Poems of H.D." could also be applied to her novel *Harriett Frean*: "In all of them, [H.D.'s poems] passion, emotion, reflection, and the image, the sharp vivid image that

(4) Sinclair, May. "The Poems of F. S. Flint". *The English Review*. 32 (1921): 7.

(5) Sinclair, May. "The Poems of Richard Aldington". *The Little Review*. May 1921, 398.

(6) Sinclair, May. "The Reputation of Ezra Pound". *The English Review*. April 1920, 330 and *The North American Review*. 211 (1920): 663.

(7) For an account of H.D.'s life in relation with other modernists see Hanscombe, Gillian and Virginia L. Smyers. "H.D.'s triangles". *Writing for their lives. The Modernist Women 1910-1940*. London: Women's Press, 1987, 14-32.

(8) Lowell, Amy. "'H.D.' and John Gould Fletcher". *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*. 1917, 256-57. Quoted by Bloom, Harold. gen. ed. *The Chelsea House Library of Literary Criticism. Twentieth-Century American Literature*. Vol. 2. New York: Chelsea, 1986, 1087.

(9) Riddel, Joseph N. "H.D. and the Poetics of 'Spiritual Realism'". *Contemporary Literature*. Autumn 1919, 447-56. Quoted by Bloom, Harold. gen. ed. *The Chelsea House Library of Literary Criticism. Twentieth-Century American Literature*. Vol. 2. New York: Chelsea, 1986, 1088.

does the work of description are fused together in the burning unity of beauty. [...] H.D. invariably presents her subtlest, most metaphysical idea under some living sensuous image solid enough to carry the emotion. [...] Everywhere she cuts clean, she finishes. No loose ends, no blurred edges”⁽¹⁰⁾.

In this article Sinclair also highlights the “sheer beauty of [...] form” of H.D.’s poems, their “lucid and sharp simplicity” and their “radiant”, “crystalline”, and “austere ecstasy”. These qualities were also pursued by Sinclair herself in *Harriett Freen*. In another article on H.D. and Imagism, Sinclair defines this movement as “the naked representation of a thing [...] in no case is the Image a symbol of reality [...] it is reality [...] itself. You cannot distinguish between the thing and its image”⁽¹¹⁾. H.D.’s optimum use of flowers in her poetry, pointed out by H.R. Sievert, is something she shares with the Symbolists. Moreover, Susan Stanford Friedman also stresses that H.D. anchors “the poem in the concrete world with images of flowers [...]” achieving, thus, clarity and simplicity in her poetic line and precise shape in her images⁽¹²⁾. H.D.’s use of colour “as an accent, a single ray of warming colour in an otherwise monochromatic landscape”⁽¹³⁾ reminds us of Sinclair’s scanty use of colour in *Harriett Freen* where only three colours predominate —blue, red and white in the egg-shaped workbox, the campion flowers and the hospital scene respectively—.

Once a general view of Imagism and Sinclair’s reaction to it has been presented, we can analyse the ways in which *Harriett Freen* can be considered an embodiment of Imagist techniques. Sinclair’s *Life and Death of Harriett Freen*, published in 1920, is the negative counterpart of *Mary Olivier: A life*, a novel Sinclair had published in 1919. *Harriett Freen*’s condensation means a development in the experiments Sinclair had introduced in *Mary Olivier*, her previous psychological novel⁽¹⁴⁾. Moreover, this quality of concentration is precisely one of the essences of Imagist poetry.

(10) Sinclair, May. “The Poems of H.D.” Rev. of *Hymen*, by H.D. *The Dial*. February 1922, 203.

(11) Sinclair, May. “Two Notes. I. On H.D. II. On Imagism”. *The Egoist*. 1 June 1915, 88.

(12) Stanford Friedman, Susan. “Introduction”. *Psyche Reborn*. 1981, 7-14. Quoted by Bloom, Harold. gen. ed. *The Chelsea House Library of Literary Criticism. Twentieth-Century American Literature*. Vol. 2. New York: Chelsea, 1986, 1096.

(13) Sievert, Heather Rosario. “H.D.: A Symbolist Perspective”. *Comparative Literature Studies*. March 1979, 48-57. Quoted by Bloom, Harold. gen. ed. *The Chelsea House Library of Literary Criticism. Twentieth-Century American Literature*. Vol. 2. New York: Chelsea, 1986, 1093.

(14) T.S. Eliot opposes the psychological novel represented by Sinclair’s *Harriett Freen* to the old narrative method of writers like Wells and Bennett. He argues that in her book “a method seems to have been carried about as far as it will go” and doubts “whether even Miss Sinclair can carry it much further” (Eliot, T.S. “London Letter. The Novel”. *The Dial*. 73 (September 1922): 330).

Both *Mary Olivier* and *Harriett Frean* tell the life of their female protagonists from their early childhood to their maturity. Their main difference is that whereas *Mary Olivier* is open-ended and its protagonist still faces the possibility of fulfilment, *Life and Death of Harriett Frean*, as the title suggests, leaves its protagonist at the gates of death, not offering her the possibility of liberation. The reason is that whilst Harriett thoughtlessly submits her will to parental authority, Mary fights her mother's will and rejects her attempts to turn her into a selfless woman⁽¹⁵⁾. In this sense, *Harriett Frean* could be called a negative counterpart of *Mary Olivier*.

Some of *Harriett Frean*'s early reviews evince an insightful understanding and appreciation of its qualities, such as its condensation and the use it makes of the "new psychology." *The Times Literary Supplement* praised it as being "packed tight ... and carved with minute precision" against other "stories of dull, uneventful lives [that] have been allowed to struggle over hundreds of pages"⁽¹⁶⁾. Critics' complaints about such novels —where many words and many chapters seem to overflow their scope— seem to justify the idea of *Harriett Frean* as an exquisite and perfect piece of workmanship that is repeated in other reviews⁽¹⁷⁾. This concept of the novel as a unity where every element has its function in the overall pattern of its structure seems to derive from the theory developed in

(15) Jean Radford points out that the heroine of *Harriett Frean* recalls Maggie Tulliver in *The Mill on the Floss* and argues that the novel can be read as a delayed response to Maggie's question: "Is it not right to resign ourselves entirely, whatever ... may be denied us? I have found great peace in that for the last two or three years - even joy in subduing my will". The answer *Life and Death of Harriett Frean* provides is "an emphatic 'No'". Radford concludes that "*Harriett Frean* is a moral fable about the narrow and pernicious life which results from self-repression, and the pernicious social effects of a deluded sacrifice". Underneath the novel runs a strong current of psychoanalytic and idealistic streams. Radford has highlighted its Freudian notions of repression and sublimation in May Sinclair's following words: "... the psycho-analysts, Freud and Jung and their followers, have been abused like pickpockets, as if they offered us no alternative but license or repression; as if the indestructible libido must either ramp outrageously in the open or burrow beneath us and undermine our sanity; as if Sublimation, the solution that they do offer, were not staring us in the face" (*May Sinclair*, 1916). Thus Radford concludes that whereas *Mary Olivier* is a study of sublimation, *Harriett Frean* is a study of repression (Radford, Jean. Introduction. 1980. *The Life and Death of Harriett Frean*. By May Sinclair. London: Virago, 1995, i-ii).

(16) "Mother-Complex". Rev. of *The Life and Death of Harriett Frean*, by May Sinclair. *The Times Literary Supplement*. 2 February 1922: 73.

(17) Thus, the novel is compared to handmade pieces of craftsmanship: "Every word is chosen and fits like a stitch set in a piece of embroidery" (Scott, Dawson C.A. "Miss May Sinclair's New Novel". Rev. of *The Life and Death of Harriett Frean*, by May Sinclair. *The Bookman*. 61 (March 1922): 266.). *Harriett Frean* is "a cameo portrait cut with delicate precision and satanic insight" (Hunt, Una. "Harriett Frean". Rev. of *Harriett Frean*, by May Sinclair. *The New Republic*. 26 July 1922: 261).

Henry James's story "The Figure in the Carpet"⁽¹⁸⁾. The novel is described as "admirably concentrated" with "few superfluous words in it and ... no superfluous episodes or descriptions"⁽¹⁹⁾. These reviews highlight that all the elements in the novel—words, chapters and even descriptions— seem to fit perfectly, like the pieces of a precise machine. As it has been pointed out before, there is a striking similarity between the reviews of H.D.'s poems and those of *Harriett Freen*. Both are compared to a cameo to refer to their acute concentration.

Harriett Freen's brevity and its evocation of a poetic style call for a more detailed analysis. The layout of the pages in the novel recalls those special arrangements required by poetry. The font's size is considerably larger than that used in other Sinclair's novels, the margins are remarkably wide—especially the superior and inferior ones—and the lines seem to be double-spaced. The expected result of these arrangements is not only a mere substantial physical expansion of the text, but also an evocation of the lyricism and concentration typical of Imagist poetry. The text calls attention to its disposition, intended to highlight its subject matter and give it a suitable form. Symbolism has to be studied in this context of the novel's parallelism to poetry. The recurrent appearance of symbols contributes to give the text a special rhythm, tone and texture. The use of imagery provides thus a poetic texture to ordinary events and uncongenial characters. The novel's unity of design also depends on the repetition of similar phrase and sentence rhythms. As some critics have shown, *Life and Death of Harriett Freen* is full of symbols that direct meaning and the drift of the story from the opening to the close⁽²⁰⁾. Such saturation of images, typical of *Harriett Freen*, has its origin in a much more timid use of imagery in *Mary Olivier*, and it contributes to the concentration of the novel⁽²¹⁾. Symbolism also entails that the reader is

(18) In fact, an early reviewer mentioned Henry James's influence on *Harriett Freen*'s technique: "Miss Sinclair has added to her difficulties by adopting the Jamesian device of telling the story, not indeed in the first person, but only as seen by the eyes and as reflected in the mind of one character" (Mortimer, Raymond. "Miss Sinclair Again". Rev. of *The Life and Death of Harriett Freen*, by May Sinclair. *The Dial*. 72 (May 1922): 533).

(19) Affable Hawk. "Current Literature. Books in General". Rev. of *The Life and Death of Harriett Freen*. *The New Statesman*. 11 February 1922: 532.

(20) Boll, Theophilus Ernest Martin. *Miss May Sinclair: Novelist. A Biographical and Critical Introduction*. Rutherford, Madison and Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1973, 274.

(21) Zegger reads *Harriett Freen*'s imagery as a criticism of Victorian values. Two images stand out in her analysis: the egg-shaped workbox and the red campion flowers Harriett is forbidden to approach as a child. The workbox represents domesticated Victorian fertility and sex, hollow and unfruitful; the red flowers represent passion and sex (Zegger, Hrisey Dimitrakis. *May Sinclair*. Boston: Twayne, 1976, 123-24). Penny Brown considers Harriett's symbolic burial of one of her dolls "a sad but perversely satisfying infliction of pain on herself" that symbolises "the burial of her own individuality and sexuality" (Brown, Penny. "May Sinclair: The Conquered Will". *The Poison at the Source. The Female Novel of Self-Development in the Early Twentieth Century*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1992, 38).

not restricted to Harriett's view. Penny Brown has defined *Harriett Frean's* style as economical, taut and impressionistic, and, as a result of this, "the imagery and the symbolism make an immediate and lasting impact on the reader"⁽²²⁾. It is in this context of the novel's poetization where the Imagist influence plays a relevant role. Thus, among the Imagist principles that can be identified in *Harriett Frean* one could mention the direct presentation of persons, events and things, achieved from the first pages of the novel, and the absence of superfluous words. Moreover, phrases in this novel are musical and they are arranged in such a careful way that they seem to be part of a poem.

The short fifteen chapters that compose *The Life and Death of Harriett Frean* give an account of more than seventy years of Harriett's life. They display a high degree of thematic coherence and are structurally independent of each other. Meaning is progressively conveyed in chapters by means of symbolism and new topics are introduced inside them by means of a blank space. The first chapter takes the reader directly into Harriett's childhood world. A nursery rhyme about a pussycat opens the novel and sets its tone. Its symbolic and structural significance will only be realized at the end of the novel, when the reader finds that the whole novel is an expansion of the meaning of this rhyme. The pussycat goes to London to see the Queen and ends up missing her because of a mouse that distracts its attention. Harriett will also miss life and fulfilment by living in the past and denying herself happiness in the name of selflessness and self-denial. This is revealed in the last pages of the novel, when Harriett is in a delirious state after being operated on, and she recites the rhyme to herself in a distorted way.

Concreteness is the predominant Imagist principle in *Harriett Frean*, and it is reflected in the language used, which is precise and devoid of abstraction. Words are neither blurred nor indefinite, but "hard and clear" and this choice of "exact" words is also typical of Imagism. In the first chapter two key images are presented: "the blue egg" and "the wax doll". The third crucial image of the novel, red campion flowers, is introduced in the second chapter. These images concentrate most of the notes of colour that can be found in *Harriett Frean*. Red and blue are diluted in the last pages of the novel into the white colour that reigns in the hospital where Harriett is operated on. Whereas blue and red represent tamed and natural sexuality respectively, white stands for Harriett's sterility and impending death.

The negative effects of self-sacrifice have a clear effect on the disintegration of Harriett's personality once her mother dies. Living for and with her parents,

(22) Brown, Penny. "May Sinclair: The Conquered Will". *The Poison at the Source. The Female Novel of Self-Development in the Early Twentieth Century*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 1992, 36.

she has not allowed herself to live her own life and develop her own personality. When her parents are gone and her point of reference in life is lost she tries to reassert herself by clinging to them: “she was more than ever the fastidious daughter of Hilton Freat”⁽²³⁾. Memory is the only satisfactory way she finds of giving meaning to her life, but living in the past means bringing her life to an end. She realises that she has had no identity to call her own, as she has always been dependent on her mother: “If only she could have remembered. It was only through memory that she could reinstate herself . . . She clung to the image of her mother; and always beside it, shadowy and pathetic, she discerned the image of her lost self.” (*Harriett Freat*, 110).

In a letter to Sinclair Lewis, May Sinclair described *Life and Death of Harriett Freat* as an experiment in condensing a whole life into a short narrative and in welding the stream-of-consciousness technique to more traditional narrative methods in order to create an aesthetically unified novel. Her frequent use of traditional omniscient methods of narration helped her overcome the fusion between the author and the protagonist. This enabled her to reveal the difference between reality and the way things appear to the protagonist⁽²⁴⁾.

An omniscient narrator discloses Harriett’s subconscious or repressed thoughts when there is a discordance between her feelings and her actions. One of such occasions takes place when Robin, her rejected suitor, tells her of his wife’s paralysis. At that time Harriett’s self-deception is so evident that she tries to convince herself that she is sorry when she is actually relieved.

Harriett did not cry. The shock of it [Prissie’s paralysis] stopped her tears. She tried to see it and couldn’t. Poor little Prissie. How terrible. She kept on saying to herself she couldn’t bear to think of Prissie paralysed. Poor little Prissie.

And poor Robin-

Paralysis. She saw the paralysis coming between them, separating them, and inside her the secret pain was soothed. She needed not think of Robert married anymore (*Harriett Freat*, 68-69).

Harriett’s expression “Poor little Prissie” is repeated many times after this passage, and it hides her subdued “wrong” feelings. Her customary repression of her emotions is indicated by means of the adjective “secret”. Pleasure and pain are intimately mingled in her to the point that one implies the other: “Her pity was sad

(23) Sinclair, May. *The Life and Death of Harriett Freat*. 1920. London: Virago, 1995, 109. All the references henceforward will be taken from this edition and placed in brackets after the quotations.

(24) Quoted by Zegger, Hrisey Dimitrakis. *May Sinclair*. Boston: Twayne, 1976, 124-25.

and beautiful and at the same time it appeased her pain" (*Harriett Frean*, 73). Harriett's self-deception is also expressed in the repeated references to her "beautiful behaviour". The adjective "beautiful" appears already at the beginning of the novel, when her parents expect her "to behave beautifully" (*Harriett Frean*, 23) and there are other paradoxical references to this adjective. Beauty is associated with goodness—"Being naughty was ... doing ugly things. Being good was being beautiful like Mamma" (*Harriett Frean*, 15).— but red campion flowers, the symbol of sexuality, are also said to be beautiful: "Look Hatty, how *beautiful* they are. Run away and put the poor things in water" (*Harriett Frean*, 20).

"Harriett was aware of a sudden tightening of her heart, of a creeping depression that weighed on her brain and worried it. She thought this was her pity for Priscilla" (*Harriett Frean*, 75).

Harriett will eventually have to acknowledge what lies behind her "beautiful behaviour". Robin's niece, Mona, teaches Harriett a lesson when she tells her that she had been selfish not to have married Robin: "She thought of herself. Of her own moral beauty. She was a selfish fool" (*Harriett Frean*, 144). However, Harriett arrogantly replies that she has acted correctly: "I was brought up not to think of myself before other people" (*Harriett Frean*, 145). Harriett's previous self-assurance about her way of acting is undermined by Robin's niece, that makes her look at her life with different eyes.

Harriett's physical decline seems to be precipitated by the collapse of her moral values. The effects of time start to be too evident on her aging body, and even her elevated idea of her own goodness seems subject to disintegration. Physical illness accelerates Harriett's decay and provides her with the perfect excuse to return to her childhood, to surrender herself to Maggie as her mother figure. Her comfort in being treated as a child is such that she chooses to continue her dependence on Maggie even after her convalescence.

Summaries of the quick passing of time are frequent in the novel and they contribute to its concentration. Time begins to go away quickly already in the second chapter, where we find short accounts of past events like: "three years went ..." and "She passed through her fourteenth year sedately" (*Harriett Frean*, 24, 26). Harriett's life is characterized as a repetition of domestic situations: "Every afternoon, through the hours before her father came home, she sat in the ... drawing-room reading *Evangeline* to her mother" (*Harriett Frean*, 26). In the following passage the reader is made aware of time in its slow passing, concentrated on Sundays, and the poetic rhythm of this sentence—achieved with repetitions—contributes to highlight that meaning. Routine is a way of forgetting about time and clinging to the past, trying to pretend that nothing changes: "And the long, long Sundays spaced the weeks and the months, hushed and sweet and rather enervating, yet with a sort of thrill in them as if somewhere the music of the church organ went on vibrating" (*Harriett Frean*, 40).

In chapters five, eight and twelve there are summaries of time where the increasing speed of its passing is highlighted. The similarity in the construction of these summaries conveys a sense of routine and repetition in Harriett's life. The parallelism in these constructions is evocative of poetic language and could also be ascribed to fairy tales: "Two, three, five years passed, with a perceptible acceleration, and Harriett was now thirty" (*Harriett Frean*, 67); "Months passed, years passed, going each one a little quicker than the last. And Harriett was thirty-nine" (*Harriett Frean*, 99); "The years passed. They went with an incredible rapidity, and Harriett was now fifty" (*Harriett Frean*, 148).

When Harriett is told that she has developed her mother's illness she only feels "a strange, solemn excitement and exaltation" in being raised to "her mother's eminence in pain" (*Harriett Frean*, 178). The simple and effective description of Harriett before the operation is evocative of poetic language. Moreover, this passage presents a typically Imagist "hard and clear" scene where objects are sharply differentiated: "She lay in her white bed in the white-curtained cubicle. Lizzie was paying for the cubicle. Kind Lizzie. Kind. Kind" (*Harriett Frean*, 179). The first sentence, with the two prepositional phrases and repetition of the adjective "white", has to be ascribed to the narrator. Then Harriett's point of view seems to come into the passage as her gratitude to Lizzie is expressed in the reiteration of the adjective "kind", without syntactical coherence. The moments previous to the operation are also described with a similar language that expresses Harriett's point of view with a poignant sense of anxiety: "... She walked down ... on her way to the theatre, very upright in her white flannel dressing-gown, with her chin held high and a look of exaltation on her face ... Her exaltation mounted. She came into the theatre. It was all white. White. White tiles. Rows of little slender knives on a glass shelf, under glass, shining. A white sink in the corner. A mixed smell of iodine and ether. The surgeon wore a white coat. Harriett made her tight lips tighter. She climbed on to the white enamel table, and lay down, ..." (*Harriett Frean*, 180-81).

Harriett's walk to the operating theatre is presented as a dramatic event. She tries to keep her dignity in front of the other patients, but her "exaltation" is suggestive of her fear and apprehension. The paragraph beginning with "She came into the theatre" has a very simple syntax that conveys Harriett's impressions in an Imagist-like manner. A lot of impressions are conveyed by rapid descriptive flashes by using short clauses and repetitions. Two succinct sentences introduce and close the paragraph, framing an enumeration of objects and impressions dominated by white colour. The sentences placed directly before and after this enumeration link it in a smooth way with the first and last sentences of the paragraph. This careful arrangement of words would be adequate for an Imagist poem if the sentences and phrases were laid out in separate lines: "She came into the theatre. / It was all white. / White. White tiles. / Rows of little slender knives on a glass shelf,

/ under glass, shining. / A white sink in the corner. / A mixed smell of iodine and ether. / The surgeon wore a white coat. / Harriett made her tight lips tighter.”

Meaning is condensed in this passage by means of its concentrated poetic language. The enumeration of the objects perceived by Harriett in this moment of tense fear has the effect of giving shape to her panic. Harriett's agitated state of mind is revealed in this passage in her visually clinging to the objects she sees. The tension mounts up between the moment she comes into the theatre and the instant when she climbs on to the table. Her subsequent loss of consciousness is represented by the five separated dots that occupy a line: “...” (*Harriett Frean*, 181).

The atmosphere of this poem-like passage recalls the third line of T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock": "Like a patient etherised upon a table"⁽²⁵⁾. The directness that Sinclair praises in Eliot's poetry is also present in the lack of superfluity that characterizes Sinclair's previously analysed passage. The goal they both pursue is also the same: to unveil the mind of a person, to depict thought as it flows in moments of agonizing anguish. The poem-like passage that has been analysed could be taken as an epitome of the influence of Imagist techniques on *Harriett Frean*. The presence of Imagism, also manifest throughout the novel, becomes intensified in this paragraph as a final compromise to this poetic doctrine.

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(25) Eliot, T.S. *Selected Poems*. 1954. London: Faber and Faber, 1990, 11. In fact, Sinclair had written an article on this poem where she defends Eliot's "elusive ... disturbing ... [and] difficult" genius. For Sinclair Eliot "does not see anything between him and reality, and makes straight to the reality he sees". She characterizes his method as startlingly direct, he is after "reality stripped naked of all rhetoric, of all ornament, of all confusing and obscuring association". Eliot has just removed "the covering from Prufrock's mind: Prufrock's mind, jumping quickly from actuality to memory and back again, like an animal, hunted, tormented, terribly and poignantly alive" (Sinclair, May. "'Prufrock and other Observations'. A Criticism". *The Little Review*. Dec 1917: 8-14).

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