

IMAGISM in literature

Imagism is the Name given to a movement in poetry, originating in 1912 and led by Ezra Pound. It was a movement in early 20th-century Anglo-American poetry that favored precision of imagery, and clear, sharp language. The Imagists rejected the sentiment and discursiveness typical of much Romantic and Victorian poetry. This was in contrast to their contemporaries, the Georgian poets, who were by and large content to work within that tradition. Group publication of work under the Imagist name appearing between 1914 and 1917 featured writing by many of the most significant figures in modernist poetry in English, as well as a number of other Modernist figures prominent in fields other than poetry.

Based in London, the Imagists were drawn from Great Britain, Ireland and the United States. Somewhat unusually for the time, the Imagists featured a number of women writers among their major figures. Imagism is also significant historically as the first organized Modernist English language literary movement or group. In the words of T. S. Eliot: "The point de repère usually and conveniently taken as the starting-point of modern poetry is the group denominated 'imagists' in London about 1910." At the time Imagism emerged, Longfellow and Tennyson were considered the paragons of poetry, and the public valued the sometimes moralizing tone of their writings. In contrast, Imagism called for a return to what were seen as more Classical values, such as directness of presentation and economy of language, as well as a willingness to experiment with non-traditional verse forms. The focus on the "thing" as "thing" (an attempt at isolating a single image to reveal its essence) also mirrors contemporary developments in avant-garde art, especially Cubism. Although Imagism isolates objects through the use of what Ezra Pound called "luminous details", Pound's Ideogrammic Method of juxtaposing concrete instances to express an abstraction is similar to Cubism's manner of synthesizing multiple perspectives into a single image.

Imagist poems were influenced by Japanese haiku, poems of 17 syllables which usually present only two juxtaposed images. This poetry strives to suggest more than its literal meaning, yet avoids overt figurative devices like allegory and even metaphor.

As one can tell by Pound's use of the word haiku, he clearly had haiku in mind when writing the poem. However, according to the modernist principle of "making it new," Pound does not simply copy haiku, but adapts it to the modern world of subway stations and anonymous faces in the crowd. The form of Pound's poem differs also from classical haiku: it has only two lines and more than 17 syllables. However, like many haiku, it does juxtapose two different images. Other ancient short forms were "made new" by the imagists, most notably the four-line Chinese lyric and the short poems and fragments from ancient Greece collected in the Greek Anthology.

Perhaps because Pound began to see imagism as a "stylistic movement, a movement of criticism rather than creation", he soon moved beyond imagism to a new poetic movement he called vorticism. While the rules and "don'ts" of imagism were designed to improve poetic writing but not necessarily to produce complete poems, vorticism was designed as a movement whose principles would apply to all the arts and be capable of producing complete works of art. Pound also wanted to add to the image further movement, dynamism, and intensity:

An Imagist anthology was published in 1914 that collected work by William Carlos Williams, Richard Aldington, and James Joyce, as well as H.D. and Pound. Other imagists included F. S. Flint, D. H. Lawrence, and John Gould Fletcher. By the time the anthology appeared, Amy Lowell had effectively appropriated Imagism and was seen as the movement's leader. Three years later, even Amy Lowell thought the movement had run its course. Pound by then was claiming that he invented Imagism to launch H.D.'s career.

Though Imagism as a movement was over by 1917, the ideas about poetry embedded in the Imagist doctrine profoundly influenced free verse poets throughout the twentieth century. Imagism influenced a number of poetry circles and movements in the 1950s, especially the Beat generation, the Black Mountain poets, and others associated with the San Francisco Renaissance. In his seminal 1950 essay, *Projective Verse*, Charles Olson, the theorist of the Black Mountain group, wrote "ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION"; his credo derived from and supplemented the Imagists.