

Modern Poetry - fourth year = 1st semester

General Introduction and background to the modern Age
The main literary movements of modern poetry
Thomas Hardy's "An August Midnight"
Gerard Manly Hopkins "Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend"
T. S. Eliot "The Love Song of Alfred J. Prufrock"
W.B. Yeats' "Easter 1916"
W.B. Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium"
Walter de la Mare's "The Listeners"
D. H. Lawrence's "Sorrow"
D. H. Lawrence "The Shadows"
W. H. Auden "Musée des Beaux Arts" and "unknown citizen "
Ezra Pound's "The return"

Introduction: The words *poem* and *poetry* derived from the Greek *poiēma* (to make) (to create). A poem is a *made thing*: a creation; an artifact. One might think of a poem as, in the words of William Carlos Williams, a "machine made of words". Machines produce some effect, or do some work. They do whatever they are designed to do. The work done by this "machine made of words" is the effect it produces in the reader's mind. A reader analyzing a poem is akin to a mechanic taking apart a machine in order to figure out how it works.

-Poetry is language used in a particular way. It can, but does not always, involve rhyme, rhythm and meter. It is a way of sharing experiences, of telling a story or expressing feelings or ideas. Poems are verses, which may be spoken or sung. The form, rhythm and word choice for imagery, the creation of pictures with words, is important in poetry. The words may form patterns of sound, verse or thought. Usually, poetry appeals to the imagination of the audience and can create vivid visual images.

“Poems can paint powerful, sharp pictures using images and emotive language which stimulate the senses. Modern poetry (free verse) doesn’t need to rhyme but it should have a rhythm.” (Bennett 1989)

Poetry is an imaginative awareness of experience expressed through meaning, sound, and rhythmic language choices so as to evoke an emotional response. It has been known to employ meter and rhyme. Poetry is an ancient form that has gone through numerous and drastic reinvention over time. The very nature of poetry as an authentic and individual mode of expression makes it nearly impossible to define.

--**Figurative language** is a tool that an author employs (or uses) to help the reader visualize (or see) what is happening in a poem. Some common types of figurative language are: simile, metaphor, alliteration, onomatopoeia, sensory language....

Imagery: How does the imagery construct the poem’s theme, tone, and purpose?

1) Visuals and Sensory: Are the images literal or figurative, abstract or concrete? What sensory experiences are evoked? Are certain images repeated?

2) Metaphor: Does the poet use metaphors to make comparisons and express images or abstract ideas? Is there an extended metaphor? What is the effect of the metaphors on the tone and theme of the poem?

3) Symbolism: Are certain objects or actions developed in the imagery symbolic of an abstract idea? Do these symbols reoccur? Do they help to create an allegory?

Syntax: How do the poet’s syntactical choices change or expand the ideas in the poem?

1) Enjambment: How are lines broken? Are they broken before a grammatical or logical completion of a thought to create an enjambment? Or are they end-stopped, breaking after the completion of a sentence or other grammatical pauses? How does the use of enjambment create a duality of meaning in the lines?

2) Verbs: Are verbs active or passive? What tense does the poet use? Is it consistent? How does tense consistency (inconsistency) affect the passage of time within the poem?

3) **Sentence Structure:** Does the poet use complete sentences, fragments, or a combination of both? Is there a pattern? How does the poet's sentence choices contribute to the understanding of the poem? Within the sentence, is the word order natural or grammatically irregular?

4) **Punctuation:** How is punctuation used or not used? Is it consistent with grammatical conventions? What effect does the punctuation create on how the poem is read? How does it affect the speed? Where are the pauses? Does the poet use italics, bold fonts, dashes, or any other uncommon fonts or punctuation devices? If so, why?

--**Poetry analysis** is the process of investigating a poem's form, content, and history in an informed way, with the aim of heightening one's own and others' understanding and appreciation of the work.

How to start analysis :

1) Give yourself a lot of time to read the poem several times. Try reading it out loud.

2) Have a copy of the poem that you can take notes on. As you read, write down every observation, question, or feeling you get from the poem as you read. Pay special attention to how the poem begins and ends.

3) Use your notes as entry points to begin your investigation and analysis of the poem. Ask yourself what elements in the poem lead you to the particular observation and how the poet achieves this effect.

4) Always keep in mind that the poet uses poetic devices to achieve a particular effect. Breaking up the poem into formal poetic components enhances your understanding of the poem's overall theme, tone, and/or general purpose. In other words, use form to understand the content and create a thesis about the poem.

Modern poetry started in the early years of the 20th century with the appearance of the Imagists. In common with many other modernists, these poets wrote in reaction to the perceived excesses of Victorian poetry, with its emphasis on traditional formalism and ornate

diction. In many respects, their criticism echoes what William Wordsworth wrote in *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* to instigate the Romantic movement in British poetry over a century earlier, criticizing the gauche and pompous school which then pervaded, and seeking to bring poetry to the layman.

Modernists saw themselves as looking back to the best practices of poets in earlier periods and other cultures. Their models included ancient Greek literature, Chinese and Japanese poetry, the troubadours, Dante and the medieval Italian philosophical poets (such as Guido Cavalcanti), and the English Metaphysical poets.

Much of early modernist poetry took the form of short, compact lyrics. As it developed, however, longer poems came to the foreground. These represent the main contribution of the modernist movement to the 20th-century English poetic canon.

Edwardian Age: The Edwardian Age was the reign of King Edward VII. By extension, it covers the period from the death of Queen Victoria into the beginning of the Great War, which we know as World War I. English and Irish literature possessed a number of prominent writers during this period, among them Rudyard Kipling, Henry James (who had moved to England from America, Joseph Conrad, George Bernard Shaw, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, J. M. Synge, H. G. Wells, Thomas Hardy, Ford Madox Ford, Katherine Mansfield, and W. B. Yeats.

Imagism: Imagism flourished in Britain and the United States for a brief period that is generally considered to be somewhere between 1909 and 1917. As part of the modernist movement, away from the sentimentality and moralizing tone of nineteenth-century Victorian poetry, imagist poets looked to many sources to help them create a new poetic expression.

For contemporary influences, the imagists studied the French symbolists, who were experimenting with free verse, a form that used a cadence that mimicked natural speech rather than the accustomed rhythm of metrical feet or lines. Rules of rhyming were also considered nonessential. The ancient form of Japanese haiku poetry influenced the imagists

to focus on one simple image. Greek and Roman classical poetry inspired some of the imagists to strive for a high quality of writing that would endure.

T. E. Hulme is credited with creating the philosophy that would give birth to Imagism. Although he wrote very little, his ideas inspired Ezra Pound to organize the new movement. Pound's "In a Station of the Metro" is often cited as one of the purest of his imagist poems. Amy Lowell took over the leadership role of the imagists when Pound moved on to other modernist modes. Her most anthologized poems include "Lilacs" and "Patterns."

Other important imagist poets include Hilda Doolittle, whose poem "Sea Poppies" reflects the Japanese influence on her writing, and whose "Oread" is often referred to as the most perfect imagist poem; Richard Aldington, who is one of the first poets to be recognized as an imagist and whose collection *Images of War* is considered to contain some of the most intense depictions of World War I; F. S. Flint, who dedicated his last collection of imagist poems, *Otherworld: Cadences to Aldington*; and John Gould Fletcher, whose collection *Goblins and Pagodas* is his most representative imagistic work.

The origins of Imagism and cubist poetry are to be found in two poems by T. E. Hulme that were published in 1909 by the Poets' Club in London. Hulme was a student of mathematics and philosophy who had established the Poets' Club to discuss his theories of poetry. The poet and critic F. S. Flint, who was a champion of free verse and modern French poetry, was highly critical of the club and its publications. From the ensuing debate, Hulme and Flint became close friends. They started meeting with other poets at the Eiffel Tower restaurant in Soho to discuss reform of contemporary poetry through free verse and the removal of all unnecessary verbiage from poems.

The American poet Ezra Pound was introduced to this group and they found that their ideas resembled his. In 1911, Pound introduced two other poets, H.D. and Richard Aldington, to **the Eiffel Tower group**. Both of these poets were students of the early Greek lyric poetry, especially the works of Sappho. In October 1912, he submitted three poems each by H.D. and Aldington under the rubric *Imagiste* to *Poetry* magazine. That month Pound's book *Ripostes* was published with an appendix called *The Complete Poetical Works of T. E. Hulme*, which carried a note that saw the first appearance of the word *Imagiste* in print.

Aldington's poems were in the November issue of *Poetry* and H.D.'s in January 1913 and Imagism as a movement was launched. The March issue contained Pound's *A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste* and Flint's *Imagisme*. The latter contained this succinct statement of the group's position:

1. Direct treatment of the "thing", whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome.
4. Complete freedom of subject matter.
5. Free verse was encouraged along with other new rhythms.
6. Common speech language was used, and the exact word was always to be used, as opposed to the almost exact word.

In setting these criteria for poetry, the Imagists saw themselves as looking backward to the best practices of pre-Romantic writing. Imagists poets used sharp language and embrace imagery. Their work, however, was to have a revolutionary impact on English-language writing for the rest of the 20th century.

In 1913, Pound was contacted by the widow of the recently deceased Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa, who while in Japan had collected word-by-word translations and notes for 150 classical Chinese poems that fit in closely with this program.

Between 1914 and 1917, four anthologies of Imagist poetry were published. In addition to Pound, Flint, H.D. and Aldington, these included work by Skipwith Cannell, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, James Joyce, Ford Madox Ford, Allen Upward, John Cournos, D. H. Lawrence and Marianne Moore. With a few exceptions, this represents a roll-call of English-language modernist poets of the time. After the 1914 volume, Pound distanced himself from the group and the remaining anthologies appeared under the editorial control of Amy Lowell.

Henry Gore (1902-1956), whose work is undergoing something of a revival was also heavily influenced by the Imagist movement, although from a different generation from H.D., Flint etc.

World War I and after

The outbreak of World War I represented a setback for the budding modernist movement for a number of reasons: firstly, writers like Aldington found themselves in active service; secondly, paper shortages and related factors meant that publication of new work became increasingly difficult; and, thirdly, public sentiment in time of war meant that war poets such as Wilfred Owen, who wrote more conventional verse, became increasingly popular. One poet who served in the war, the visual artist David Jones, later resisted this trend in his long experimental war poem "In Parenthesis", which was written directly out of his trench experiences but was not published until 1937.

The war also tended to undermine the optimism of the Imagists. This was reflected in a number of major poems written in its aftermath. Pound's "Homage to Sextus Propertius" (1919) uses the loose translations and transformations of the Latin poet Propertius to ridicule war propaganda and the idea of empire. His "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" (1921) represents his farewell to Imagism and lyric poetry in general. The writing of these poems coincided with Pound's decision to abandon London permanently.

The most famous English-language modernist work arising out of this post-war disillusionment is T. S. Eliot's epic "The Waste Land" (1922). Eliot was an American poet who had been living in London for some time. Although he was never formally associated with the Imagist group, his work was admired by Pound, who, in 1915, helped him publish "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", which brought him to prominence. When Eliot had completed his original draft of a long poem based on both the disintegration of his personal life and mental stability, and the culture around him, he gave the manuscript, provisionally titled "He Do the Police in Different Voices", to Pound for comment. After some heavy editing, "The Waste Land" in the form in which we now know it was published, and Eliot came to be seen as the voice of a generation. The addition of notes to the published poem served to highlight the use of collage as a literary technique, paralleling similar practice by

the cubists and other visual artists. From this point on, modernism in English tended towards poetry of the fragment that rejected the idea that the poet could present a comfortably coherent view of life.

T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" is a foundational text of modernism, representing the moment at which Imagism moves into modernism proper. Broken, fragmented and seemingly unrelated slices of imagery come together to form a disjunctive anti-narrative. The motif of sight and vision is as central to the poem as it is to modernism; the omni-present character Tiresias acting as a unifying theme. The reader is thrown into confusion, unable to see anything but a heap of broken images. The narrator, however (in "The Waste Land" as in other texts), promises to show the reader a different meaning; that is, how to *make* meaning from dislocation and fragmentation. This construction of an exclusive meaning is essential to modernism.

Maturity

With the publication of *The Waste Land*, modernist poetry appeared to have made a breakthrough into wider critical discourse and a broader readership. However, the economic collapse of the late 1920s and early 1930s had a serious negative impact on the new writing. For American writers, living in Europe became more difficult as their incomes lost a great deal of their relative value. While Gertrude Stein, Barney and Joyce remained in the French city, much of the scene they had presided over scattered. Pound was in Italy, Eliot in London, H.D. moved between that city and Switzerland, and many of the other writers associated with the movement were now living in the States.

The economic depression, combined with the impact of the Spanish Civil War, also saw the emergence, in the Britain of the 1930s, of a more overtly political poetry, as represented by such writers as W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender. Although nominally admirers of Eliot, these poets tended towards a poetry of radical content but formal conservativeness. For example, they rarely wrote free verse, preferring rhyme and regular stanza patterns in much of their work.

20th-century disputes

Some 20th-century literary theorists, relying less on the opposition of prose and poetry, focused on the poet as simply one who creates using language, and poetry as what the poet creates. The underlying concept of the poet as creator is not uncommon, and some modernist poets essentially do not distinguish between the creation of a poem with words, and creative acts in other media. Yet other modernists challenge the very attempt to define poetry as misguided.

The rejection of traditional forms and structures for poetry that began in the first half of the 20th century coincided with a questioning of the purpose and meaning of traditional definitions of poetry and of distinctions between poetry and prose, particularly given examples of poetic prose and prosaic poetry. Numerous modernist poets have written in non-traditional forms or in what traditionally would have been considered prose, although their writing was generally infused with poetic diction and often with rhythm and tone established by non-metrical means. While there was a substantial formalist reaction within the modernist schools to the breakdown of structure, this reaction focused as much on the development of new formal structures and syntheses as on the revival of older forms and structures.

Recently, postmodernism has come to convey more completely prose and poetry as distinct entities, and also among genres of poetry, as having meaning only as cultural artifacts. Postmodernism goes beyond modernism's emphasis on the creative role of the poet, to emphasize the role of the reader of a text (Hermeneutics), and to highlight the complex cultural web within which a poem is read. Today, throughout the world, poetry often incorporates poetic form and diction from other cultures and from the past, further confounding attempts at definition and classification that were once sensible within a tradition such as the Western canon.