

Lecture 8 Imagism

I had never heard of *vers libre* till I was "discovered" by Ezra Pound. . . . I did a few poems that I don't think Ezra liked, . . . but later he was beautiful about my first authentic verses, . . . and sent my poems in for me to Miss Monroe [Harriet, editor of *Poetry*]. He signed them for me "H.D., Imagiste." The name seems to have stuck somehow.

---H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), *Autobiographies*, 1951

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.

--Pound's rules for writing Imagist poems as reported by F. S. Flint in *Poetry* 1913

An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. . . . It is the presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.

It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works.--
Pound, "A Few Don'ts by an Imagist," *Poetry* 1913

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 experience of new moods---and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon "free verse" as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as a prize of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea.
3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. It is not good art to write badly about aeroplanes and automobiles; nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. . . .
4. To present an image (hence the name: Imagist). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render the particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.
5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred and indefinite.
6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry.

---Amy Lowell, Preface to *Some Imagist Poets*, 1915

Imagism Image List

Unless otherwise noted, all images reproduced from the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library:

---Photo of H.D. with locket, c. 1915

---Photo of H.D., c. 1935

---Photo of H.D. in front of Sterling Library with Prof. Norman Holmes Pearson and Bryher, 1956

---Photo of H.D. in Sterling Library, with exhibition case in honor of her seventieth birthday, 1956

---Photo of H.D.'s death mask by R. A. Stahli, 1961

---Photo of H.D., c. 1915, inscribed "To Marianne Moore, H.D."

---*Poetry Magazine* 1 (1912) 1; front cover

---"Translations and Reflections from 'The Anthology'" by "H.D., Imagiste," including "Hermes of the Ways," "Priapus," and "Epigram," in *Poetry Magazine* 1 (1913) 4: 120-22

---*Des Imagistes: An Anthology* (London: The Poetry Bookshop; New York: Boni, 1914); front cover, title page, and table of contents

---*Some Imagist Poets* (London: Constable; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1915); front cover and table of contents

---Amy Lowell, "Preface," *Some Imagist Poets* (1915), v-viii

---Photo of Ezra Pound, c. 1913 [source: Torrey, *The Roots of Treason*]