

Imagiste

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My final project was made in the spirit of the Imagist movement in poetry, in which poets utilized metaphors, similes, and other figurative language for a more literal style. Ezra Pound's, "In the Station of a Metro," practices all of the signature traits of Imagism in a mere fourteen words:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

The brevity of this poem aligns with the efforts of Imagist poets to never waste a word, and the lack of non-descriptive words is true to the idea that poets should "trust the image," as there is no attempt to add any moral or emphasize a connection to humanity.

This series of photos and paintings represents the practice of these concepts; to transfer the essence of real image to a work of art without adding or embellishing.

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Imagism was an early 20th century movement in poetry that sought to create clear Images through simple language. The movement moved away from the traditional meter, preferring a more straightforward style, removing romanticism and “mere decoration.” The concepts of Imagism were conceived by poet and philosopher T.E. Hulme in 1908, where, inspired by the non-figurative beauty of the Japanese Haiku, and ancient Greek writings, he describes a poetic language in which the Image was “the very essence” of verse, never taking a backseat to morals and metaphors. His ideas are the essence of Imagism and the first ever signs of it. Hulme, however, is not credited as the founder of Imagism. The man who took the ideas of Hulme, and turned them into a movement was a poet by the name of Ezra Pound. Pound was the first to use the term “Imagiste” to describe Hilda Doolittle in POETRY magazine in 1912. Later that year, Ezra Pound and another poet, Richard Aldington, came up with three “Principles” of Imagism: Direct treatment of the “thing” whether subjective or objective. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.

Ezra Pound stresses that these principles are only the “result of long contemplation” by two people, and not to be taken as “dogma.” He says to “never consider anything as dogma.” This list begins an essay by Pound, published in POETRY magazine, called “A Few Don’ts”, illustrating the things an imagist writer does not do in their writing. The non-abstract style of Imagism quickly became popularized, with poets like William Carlos Williams and Hilda Doolittle contributing. The movement, however, would quickly face problems, and these problems would come from within.

Amy Lowell was a poet who was 36 in 1910. She took an interest in the Imagist movement when she saw some of her own work echoing some of the calls of Imagism. Her interest led her to travel to London, where she intended to meet Ezra Pound. Her intentions were met, and she became friends with the founder of the Imagist movement. Lowell made an effort after this meeting, to bring the Imagist movement back to the states. She would return to London often, meeting and befriending many poets and authors and becoming deeply woven in the Imagist community. The Imagist community, however, would soon be divided. Pound became a controversial figure, many believing that his leadership of the Imagist movement was more of a fascist dictatorship than anything, as he edited the anthology of Imagist poetry to his own liking, and to his own rules by only letting the poems into his book that followed his dogma. Amy Lowell would have to pick a side eventually, as her presence in Imagism was prominent, and with this poem, she had more than chosen:

Astigmatism

Amy Lowell, 1874 – 1925

To Ezra Pound: with Much Friendship and Admiration and Some Differences of Opinion

The Poet took his walking-stick
Of fine and polished ebony.
Set in the close-grained wood
Were quaint devices;
Patterns in ambers,
And in the clouded green of jades.
The top was smooth, yellow ivory,

And a tassel of tarnished gold
Hung by a faded cord from a hole
Pierced in the hard wood,
Circled with silver.
For years the Poet had wrought upon this cane.
His wealth had gone to enrich it,
His experiences to pattern it,
His labour to fashion and burnish it.
To him it was perfect,
A work of art and a weapon,
A delight and a defence.
The Poet took his walking-stick
And walked abroad.

Peace be with you, Brother.

The Poet came to a meadow.
Sifted through the grass were daisies,
Open-mouthed, wondering, they gazed at the sun.
The Poet struck them with his cane.
The little heads flew off, and they lay
Dying, open-mouthed and wondering,
On the hard ground.
“They are useless. They are not roses,” said the Poet.

Peace be with you, Brother. Go your ways.

The Poet came to a stream.
Purple and blue flags waded in the water;
In among them hopped the speckled frogs;
The wind slid through them, rustling.
The Poet lifted his cane,
And the iris heads fell into the water.
They floated away, torn and drowning.
“Wretched flowers,” said the Poet,
“They are not roses.”

Peace be with you, Brother. It is your affair.

The Poet came to a garden.
Dahlias ripened against a wall,
Gillyflowers stood up bravely for all their short stature,
And a trumpet-vine covered an arbour
With the red and gold of its blossoms.
Red and gold like the brass notes of trumpets.
The Poet knocked off the stiff heads of the dahlias,

And his cane lopped the gillyflowers at the ground.
Then he severed the trumpet-blossoms from their stems.
Red and gold they lay scattered,
Red and gold, as on a battle field;
Red and gold, prone and dying.
“They were not roses,” said the Poet.

Peace be with you, Brother.
But behind you is destruction, and waste places.

The Poet came home at evening,
And in the candle-light
He wiped and polished his cane.
The orange candle flame leaped in the yellow ambers,
And made the jades undulate like green pools.
It played along the bright ebony,
And glowed in the top of cream-coloured ivory.
But these things were dead,
Only the candle-light made them seem to move.
“It is a pity there were no roses,” said the Poet.

Peace be with you, Brother. You have chosen your part.

Her depiction of Ezra Pound as an old crank who destroyed flowers with a cane simply because they weren't roses, paralleled his Ideological view of Imagist poems, refusing to publish those that didn't fit into his ideals. In response to this letter, he insulted her poetry, calling her work “Amymism”, a play on the word Imagism. Once friends, Lowell and Pound had taken rival sides of the argument that would break Imagism as a movement. . The most famous contributors began distancing themselves in 1916, and by 1917, The movement was as good as dead. The style of writing that propelled the movement, however, would live beyond the grave of Pound's ambitions. The influence and great works that the movement produced, would make the Imagism's short life worth it.

Two notable products of the short lived motion of imagism include these poems:

PASTORAL

The little sparrows
Hop ingenuously
About the pavement
Quarreling
With sharp voices
Over those things
That interest them.
But we who are wiser
Shut ourselves in

On either hand
And no one knows
Whether we think good
Or evil.

 Then again,
The old man who goes about
Gathering dog lime
Walks in the gutter
Without looking up
And his tread
Is more majestic than
That of the Episcopal minister
Approaching the pulpit
Of a Sunday.
These things
Astonish me beyond words.

-William Carlos Williams

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

-Ezra Pound