

## Essay on Imagism in American Poetry

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Imagism is one of the most significant movements in the history of American literature. Imagism as a literary movement took place in American poetry during the early decades of the 20th century. The followers of this movement gave emphasis on the use of precise imagery and clear, sharp language. Due to its merits, this movement was considered as 'the most influential movement in English poetry since the activity of the Pre-Raphaelites.' A close study of imagist poetry shows that it has gone away from the traditional poetry as the imagists 'rejected the sentiment and discursiveness', the typical aspects of 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.

The Imagist movement was based in London with its practitioners coming from Great Britain, Ireland and America. The significant aspect of this movement is that for the first time in the history of any literary movement here the major practitioners were women writers. Another significant feature of this movement is that it was the 'first organized Modernist English language literary movement or group.' In this respect, T. S. Eliot, one of the major practitioners of this movement rightly said that: "The point de repère usually and conveniently taken as the starting-point of modern poetry is the group denominated 'imagists' in London about 1910."

Before the advent of Imagist movement, the lovers of poetry valued the poetry for its moralizing tone. The great poets like Longfellow and Tennyson were considered to be the epitomes of poetry as their poetry sometimes displayed the moralizing tone. On the contrary, the practitioners of Imagist poetry "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." It is seen that these poets focused on the "thing" as "thing" in their attempt at isolating a single image to reveal its essence. This approach is also evident in the contemporary developments in modern art forms including Cubism. Although Imagist poets attempted to isolate objects through the use of '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."

During the Victorian period, the all-time great poets like Alfred Lord Tennyson were producing the poetry of great merit. However, after Tennyson, the poets of the Edwardian era, namely the poet laureate Alfred Austin, Stephen Phillips, and William Watson were producing weak imitations of the poetry of Victorian period. They were trying to imitate Tennyson's style of writing without any major innovative change either in their choice of themes or the form. In these attempts, they could not succeed much resulting in the creation of poor quality literary works. With the turn of the century, new poets with their new approach emerged on the scene and changed the course of writing poetry.

Most of the scholars generally agree upon the fact that Imagism originated in T.E. Hulme's poems, *Autumn* and *A City Sunset*. Hulme was soon followed by the other like-minded poets like Gilbert, Sullivan, F.V. Dickins, and Sadakichi Hartmann. These poets started to work on similar principles. As Ezra Pound realized that his ideas are akin to those of the imagists, he soon joined the group and started to write as per the principles of Imagist writing.

While working with the Imagists, Ezra Pound attempted to trace the origin of the movement to W.B. Yeats, Arthur Symons and even to Mallarmé. It is evident from Pound's introduction to the book of poetry by Lionel Johnson. Here Ezra Pound made the position of the Imagists clear by saying that treating the 'thing' directly, avoiding the use of any superfluous word, and composing in sequence of the musical phrase are the essential attributes of Imagist poetry. At the beginning of his discussion, Pound defined the term 'image' by saying that image is "that which presents an intellectual and

emotional complex in an instant of time” and further added that that “It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works”. By expressing his views on what should and should not be done while writing poetry, Pound tried to make the imagist poetry to follow certain principles which will enable it to be appreciated by the readers. However, he never claimed that his principles should be followed as the rigid rules. While making their stand clear in this respect, F.S. Flint, Pound’s companion and one of the followers of Imagism, said that “we have never claimed to have invented the moon. We do not pretend that our ideas are original”. These words clearly show that Pound, Flint and other Imagists followed the same old method of presenting their subjects only with the difference in the manner of their presentation.

Thus, Imagism gained momentum in the early decades of 20th century and went on to influence the poetic movements like ‘the Beat generation, the Black Mountain poets, and the poets of the San Francisco Renaissance. Thus, as a literary movement, Imagism was followed by many well-known poets who immensely contributed to the body of Imagist poetry.