

MODERNIST POETIC THEORY

All poetry is experimental poetry.

Wallace Stevens

A particular convention or attitude in art has a strict analogy to the phenomena of organic life. It grows old and decays. It has a definite period of life and must die. All the possible tunes get played on it and then it is exhausted; moreover its best period is its youngest.... What has found expression in painting as Impressionism will soon find expression in poetry as free verse.

T.E. Hulme

Imagism was something that was important for poets learning their craft early in this century. But after learning his craft, the poet will find his true direction....One writes the kind of poetry one likes. Other people put labels on it.

Hilda Doolittle (H.D.)

To me, at that time, a poem was an image, the picture was the important thing.... A poem is a small (or large) machine made of words. When I say there's nothing sentimental about a poem I mean that there can be no part, as in any other machine, that is redundant.... As in all machines its movement is intrinsic, undulant, a physical more than a literary character. In a poem that movement is distinguished in each case by the character of the speech from which it arises.... There is no poetry of distinction without formal invention, for it is in the intimate form that works of art achieve their exact meaning, in which they most resemble the machine, to give language its highest dignity, its illumination in the environment to which it is native.... No ideas but in things.

William Carlos Williams

...the starting point of modern poetry is the group denominated "imagist" in London in about 1910.... [The movement] is chiefly important because of the stimulus it gave to later developments.

T.S. Eliot

If a certain thing was said once for all in Atlantis or Arcadia, in 450 before Christ or in 1290 after, it is not for us moderns to go saying it over, or to go obscuring the memory of the dead by saying the same thing with less skill and less conviction. My pawing over the ancients and semi-ancients has been one struggle to find out what has been done, once for all, better than it can ever be done again, and to find out what remains for us to do, and plenty does remain, for if we still feel the same emotions as those which launched the thousand ships, it is quite certain that we come on these feelings differently, through different nuances, by different intellectual gradations. Each age has its own abounding gifts yet only some ages transmute them into matter of duration. No good poetry is ever written in a manner twenty years old, for to write in such a manner shows conclusively that the writer thinks from books, convention and cliché, and not from life.... An "image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.... Make it new!

Ezra Pound (1911)

To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms, as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as a principle of liberty. We believe 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.

Amy Lowell

Preface to *Some Imagist Poets* (1915)

...If you demand on the one hand, / the raw material of poetry in / all its rawness and / that which is on the other hand / genuine, you are interested in poetry.

Marianne Moore (1921)