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## **ROBERT FROST AND EZRA POUND: COMPLEXITY OF THOUGHT AND IMAGISTIC PRECISION**

**SUMMARY:** The American poetry of roughly the first half of the twentieth century is unexcelled in its richness, inventiveness, and diversity. The variety of poetry written and published in the United States in the last century represents a unique explosion of literary creativity. Its range of forms, styles, and preoccupations are in a fundamental sense uncontainable. They exceed any single story one might try to tell about them. However, it is a field that continues to change, not only because poetry long out of print is being made available again and given thorough analysis but also because scholars continue to discover important early and mid-twentieth-century poetry that missed being published for various reasons. It was not until the second decade of the century that poets began to come to terms with the important social and economic changes of the modern era, such as the introduction of new technologies into all areas of industry and commerce and the increasingly urban character of American life. The first generation of American poets to respond to this modern world included Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, T. S. Eliot, E. E. Cummings and Marianne Moore. It was with this generation (having published their first books between 1908 and 1923) that the true artistic achievement of American poetic writing was clearly established.

**KEY WORDS:** *American poetry, modernism, variety, changes of the modern era, urban character.*

## Birth of Modernism

The term *modernity* describes the outcomes of the period of philosophical, scientific and political upheavals commonly known as *enlightenment*. Roger Mitchell (1991) notes that the general term of Modernism, or Modernity, evoked, and still evokes the culture made by science and technology – the truth being that things which are modern are still those that are technologically advanced. During the first half of the nineteenth century, however, an irreversible split occurred between ‘modernity as a stage in the history of Western civilization – a product of scientific and technological progress, of the industrial revolution ... and modernity as an aesthetic concept’ (Calinescu, 1987: 41). This is why a conclusion can be made that the word *modern* is only a relative term which escapes final definition. As for the American literature, on the other hand, it is generally accepted that with the appearance of Herman Melville, Mark Twain, and Walt Whitman<sup>1</sup> (Bode, 1971b: 63) it became modern as well as American. In the history of poetry especially the line may be drawn with some certainty. The publication of Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, and the Civil War (1861-1865) symbolized the close of one era and the beginning of another. It is with these events that the beginnings of modern American poetry may be defined (Untermeyer, 1962: 3).

In the twentieth century, as noted by Francis E. Skipp (1992: 75), Modernism is the term applied to an international movement dominating the arts of Western culture from shortly after the turn of the century until around 1950. The movement, in general, is characterized by a rejection of tradition and a hostile attitude toward the immediate past. As for the American literary history, ‘the period 1915-1949 is one of the richest and most crucial’ (Burt 2004: 335). No other period produced so many masterworks or had such a profound and durable historical, social, and cultural legacy, shaping the social and literary policies and practices for the remainder of the twentieth century. Sinclair Lewis

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<sup>1</sup> Walt Whitman is the representative literary figure of the period. His poetry and prose ‘... more nearly than the works of any other writer, reflect the emotions and changing attitudes which marked the transition of the United States from a phenomenon of eighteenth century liberalism to a modern nation.’

(1885-1951), America's first Nobel Prize winner in Literature (1930), called the era America's second "coming of age" (*Ibid: loc. cit.*). This really was a period of maturation when poetry, fiction, and drama broke with conventions and reached unparalleled creative achievement.

Just as America, in connection with World War I, was thrust into the centre of international politics, so its writers and artists emerged as leading intellectual and artistic voices who addressed the shattered confidence in a civilization that seemed bent on self-destruction. It was then that American expatriate poets such as Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot (Beasley, 2007: 14) forged new methods of modern expression,<sup>2</sup> and it fell to artists and writers to interpret the meaning of total mechanized warfare and America's new role on the world's stage. Burt (2004: 335) deduces that the result was an explosion of literary achievement far surpassing the first great American literary renaissance of the mid-nineteenth century.

The War also opened the door for European influences. American writers increasingly absorbed, imitated, and transformed the ideas and methods of European modernist masters such as James Joyce and Marcel Proust, and their predecessors, such as Henrik Ibsen, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Charles Baudelaire, and Joseph Conrad. Modernism originated in the post-Darwinian erosion of religious faith (Baxter, 2009: 68), in an erosion of faith in the social and psychological absolutes of the nineteenth century, and a consequent drive to discover new artistic modes of representing reality, new ways of self-understanding and emotional and spiritual renewal. In a word, World War I showed conclusively that old beliefs were corrupt and had to be replaced. Pound's poems *Homage to Sextus Propertius* and *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly* refer to the aftermath of World War I and consider the conflicts between the

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<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Beasley says that T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme and Ezra Pound are three of the most significant figures in the early twentieth-century literary phenomenon we have come to call Modernism. They revolutionized Anglo-American poetry, arguing that traditional poetic forms and themes could no longer encapsulate the experience of the modern world. They were pioneers in the use of free verse and in their expansion of the subject matter of poetry. During his short career, T.E. Hulme provided the intellectual impetus for Pound's imagist movement, which Eliot called "the starting-point of modern poetry". Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Pound's *The Cantos* are renowned as two of the most innovative and influential poems in the English language.

demands of the time and the self. *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly* (1920) is ‘/t/he first major work in which Pound expresses this embittered social vision’ (Witemeyer, 1999: 54). In this poem, Ezra Pound wrote (Emmitt, 1993: 194):

*There died a myriad,  
And of the best, among them,  
For an old bitch gone in the teeth,  
For a botched civilization,*

*Charm, smiling at the good mouth,  
Quick eyes gone under earth’s lid,*

*For two gross of broken statues,  
For a few thousand battered books.*

Pound’s sounding cry – *Make It New!* – defined the modernist agenda: sift the fragments of an exploded culture in search of new and sustaining sources of order, coherence, and faith. New language, new artistic forms, new relations between the artist and society were needed. And for the first time in history, Americans would lead the charge. It was an American, T. S. Eliot, who wrote what William Carlos Williams<sup>3</sup> (electronic source) later would describe as the “atomic bomb” of modern poetry, *The Waste Land*<sup>4</sup> (electronic source).

<sup>3</sup> William Carlos Williams (1883/1963) has always been known as an experimenter, an innovator, a revolutionary figure in American poetry. Yet in comparison to artists of his own time who sought a new environment for creativity as expatriates in Europe, Williams lived a remarkably conventional life. A doctor for more than forty years serving the New Jersey town of Rutherford, he relied on his patients, the America around him, and his own imagination to create a distinctively American verse, often domestic in focus. That was perhaps why Williams could not foresee, however, what he later called the “atom bomb” on modern poetry – T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. Williams had no quarrel with Eliot’s genius – he said Eliot was writing poems as good as Keats’s *Ode to a Nightingale* – but, simply, “we were breaking the rules, whereas he was conforming to the excellencies of classroom English.” As he explained in his *Autobiography*, ‘I felt at once that it had set me back twenty years and I’m sure it did. Critically, Eliot returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt we were on a point to escape to matters much closer to the essence of a new art form itself – rooted in the locality which should give it fruit.’

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Stearns Eliot (1888-1965) was an essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic and one of the twentieth century’s major poets. Born in St. Louis,

It is not only their poetic experimentation, however, that makes these poets significant. The thinking of Eliot and Pound is largely responsible for shaping the modernism as analysed and studied today. They were the primary theorists of the major issues traditionally associated with modernism (Stead, 1986): disinterestedness vs. political engagement, elitism vs. democracy, tradition vs. novelty, abstraction vs. realism. Their fascination with obscure literary traditions and contemporary philosophy even established an enormously influential system of literary values, disseminated through their critical essays and their editorial authority.

When modern American poetry arrived on the stage, the Imagist revolution of the century's second decade played a key role (Kalaidjian, 2006: 68-69). One of the Imagist movement's emphases was on extreme concision and on a certain neutrality of description. Imagism isolates objects through the use of what Pound called "luminous details", attempting to study a single image to reveal its essence. Ezra Pound's *In a Station of the Metro* (1913), and W. C. Williams' *The Red Wheelbarrow* (1923) remain two of its defining texts.

### Both personal and universal

ROBERT LEE FROST (1874-1963), New England's cherished poet, has been called 'America's purest classical lyricist and one of the outstanding poets of the twentieth century' (Snodgrass, 2000: 22). 'He was

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Missouri, the United States, he moved to the United Kingdom in 1914. Eliot attracted widespread attention for his poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1915), which is seen as a masterpiece of the Modernist movement. It was followed by some of the best-known poems in the English language, including *The Waste Land* (1922), *The Hollow Men* (1925), *Ash Wednesday* (1930) and *Four Quartets* (1945). He is also known for his seven plays, particularly *Murder in the Cathedral* (1935). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1948. *The Waste Land* is Eliot's 434-line poem, widely regarded as "one of the most important poems of the 20th century" and a central text in Modernist poetry. The poem first appeared in the UK in the 1922 October issue of *The Criterion*, and in the US in the November issue of *The Dial*. Among its famous phrases are "April is the cruellest month", "I will show you fear in a handful of dust", and the mantra in the Sanskrit language "Shantih shantih shantih".

among the great poets of the century – or any century’ (Parini, Miller, 1993: 260).

The poetry of Robert Frost is both personal and universal. Rooted in New England, it comes to flower in an art which is both modern and traditional – modern in its ambivalent formulations of the truth, traditional in its use of established metrical conventions such as the couplet, the sonnet, the rhymed quatrain, the ballad, and blank verse. Romantic in his symbolic expression of local speech, plain people, and the New England regional scene, Frost voiced the twentieth-century conflict between reason and unreason, doubt and faith. He was too honest and too stubborn to take sides. Conservative in temper, experimental in mind, always prepared to test life by trial and discovery rather than by tradition alone. Frost was not afraid to be didactic, but he was never dogmatic. He seems to some a bit old-fashioned or puritanical in his ethicism and Emersonian individualism (Emerson, 1837; Bode, 1971a), but he was also a psychologist, a naturalist, and an early existential-humanist.

The first of many anomalies in the career of this indigenous New Englander was the fact of his birth and early life in the raw, frontier community of San Francisco during the 1870s, where his adventurous and unconventional father, having abandoned his native Massachusetts in a flurry of sympathy for the post-war South, went to take up newspaper work. When Robert was ten, his father died. His mother, a school teacher with literary talents, returned to New England (Lawrence, Massachusetts) where, with some help from Frost’s grandfather, she supported her two children and gave them education. In 1892 Robert Frost graduated from Lawrence High School, valedictorian<sup>5</sup> (electronic source) of his class, and entered Dartmouth, but soon

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<sup>5</sup> This is an academic title conferred upon the student who delivers the closing statement at a graduation ceremony – *valedictory*. This is usually the student with the highest ranking among his or her graduating class. The term is a derivation of the Latin *vale dicere* (“to say farewell”), rooted in the *valedictorian*’s traditional role as the final speaker at the graduation ceremony. The *valedictory address* is considered a final farewell to classmates, before they disperse to pursue their individual paths. The term is most often used in the USA, Canada, and The Philippines. Its equivalent in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Iceland, and Scotland is *dux*; in France – *Major de promotion*.

withdrew. With something of his father's restless spirit, he tried various odd jobs – shoemaking, journalism, farming, even school teaching. In all this, the one occupation he steadily pursued was writing poetry, which did not pay. In 1895 he married his high-school classmate and co-valedictorian, Elinor White. With a growing family, Frost taught in a private school and in 1897 made another attempt at college as a special student at Harvard. This time he stayed two years, but decided once again that an academic career was not for him. Later, however, when his reputation as a poet was established, he was to spend much of his life as a poet-in-residence and teacher of literature and philosophy, stimulating students with wisdom, wit, and understanding. He taught at Amherst, Michigan, and Dartmouth in various intervals between 1917 and 1938, always returning to his farms in New Hampshire and Vermont to write.

The year 1912 became a turning point of Frost's life, when he and his wife decided to risk and make a new start. They sold their farm at Derry, New Hampshire, and moved the family of four children to England, renting a house in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, where Frost felt he could share in the atmosphere of the new poetry movement and “write and be poor without further scandal in the family” (Meyers, 1996). The gamble was a success. *A Boy's Will* (1913), his first volume of verse, was immediately accepted. It was followed in 1914 by *North of Boston*, now a landmark in the history of American poetry (Hamilton, 1994). Frost won the respect of his fellow Georgian poets, Wilfred Gibson, Edward Thomas, and Rupert Brooke. He met the omnipresent Ezra Pound, who promptly wrote a review of his poems for the *Poetry* magazine, making Frost known in his native country. Like so many American writers, Frost made his reputation in England, and when both of his books were published in the United States in 1915, he told his wife: “My book has gone home. We must go too.” (Foerster *et al.*, 1971: 833-834).

The Frost family, with five children now, settled in Franconia, New Hampshire, the farm which gave title to his next volume, *Mountain Interval* (1916). He began public readings of his poetry, giving “unpoetic” renderings of the now familiar lines from *Mending Wall*, *Birches*,

and other poems with the laconic New England idioms and understated rhythms so essential to his meaning. In 1923 *New Hampshire: A Poem with Notes and Grace Notes* won him the first of his four Pulitzer Prizes. Invitations for lectureships, fellowships, readings, and writers' conferences came rapidly. He received honorary degrees from more than forty colleges and universities, including Oxford and Cambridge in 1957. Gradually Frost came to be acknowledged as a kind of unofficial American poet laureate. He was twice honoured on his birthday by resolutions of the US Senate. He was invited to read *The Gift Outright* at the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy in 1961.<sup>6</sup> (Tuten, Zubizarreta, 2001: 118).

In 1949 *The Complete Poems of Robert Frost* gathered all of his work to the date in one volume, including such volumes as *West-Running Brook* (1928), *A Further Range* (1936), *A Witness Tree* (1942), *Steeple Bush* (1947), and his two verse-dramas, *A Masque of Reason* (1945) and *A Masque of Mercy* (1947). One later volume, *A Clearing Range* (1962), appeared before his death in Boston in 1963.

Frost's poetry is modern in its complexity of thought and in its awareness of the confusion of belief and the fragmenting of earlier human experience and values. His style is deceptively simple, drawing on images of nature and regionally defined materials, such as in *The Road Not Taken* (1916) (Kostić, 1993: 94-95):

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveller, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

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<sup>6</sup> "For John F. Kennedy His Inauguration", composed as a preface to *The Gift Outright* for the occasion of President John F. Kennedy's inauguration, was not read by Robert Frost on the day of inauguration due to blinding sun on the podium. Frost did, however, recite *The Gift Outright* from memory. When Frost appeared on the inauguration on 20 January 1961, he was seen and heard by a television audience estimated in excess of 60 million Americans. The poem's present title and form were established in Frost's final volume, *In the Clearing* (1962).



*Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –  
I took the one less travelled by,  
And that has made all the difference.*

It is obvious that Frost was no retrospective romantic poet. Own personal dilemmas, social and economic problems, industrial and urban dislocations, are not his surface subjects, rather the twentieth-century mind is fully exposed in his poetry, as effectively as in the work of such symbolist poets as Yeats and Eliot, however in quite different terms.

### **Make It New!**

EZRA LOOMIS POUND (1885-1972) was born in Hailey, Idaho, to move with his family to Philadelphia when he was only two. He attended the University of Pennsylvania before earning his B.A. degree at Hamilton College (1905). Continuing his work in Romance languages, especially the Provençal of the twelfth-century Troubadour poets, he earned his M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1906. Following a Harrison Fellowship from the University of Pennsylvania (1906), which he used to finance a trip to Spain, Pound took a teaching post at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, Indiana. After offering a young burlesque actress shelter for a night, however, he was removed from the college for what was interpreted as immoral behaviour. This abrupt ending to his American teaching career brought the start of Pound's ascen-

dancy in the London literary scene (Moody, 2007). In 1908, after a stay in Gibraltar and then Venice, where he published his first book – *A Lume Spento* (1908), Pound went to London. A steady stream of publications followed, both in Europe and America, as well as editorships for renowned poetry magazines, such as *Poetry* (1912), the *Little Review* (1917), and the *Dial* (1920). Although he never received the accolades he thought he deserved (and which his contemporaries Eliot, whom he helped edit and revise *The Waste Land*, and Frost, did), he eventually won the *Dial* award for poetry (1928), an honorary degree from Hamilton College (1939), the prestigious Bollingen Prize for Poetry (1949), and the Academy of American Poets Award (1963).

Pound's estrangement from the United States creates a violent tension in his poetry. In *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* (1920), he ridicules America for its cultural poverty, referring to his homeland as "a half-savage country" (Witemeyer, 1999). American pragmatism, on the other hand, fostered in Pound a predilection for vernacular and rough directness. Indicative of his linguistic range are his diction choices, such as "Guffaw", "Kulchur" instead of "Culture", and "sd" instead of "said". Pound's early poetry, however – from *A Lume Spento*, *Personae* (1909), and much of the loose translations in *Cathay* (1915) – owes much to Browning's<sup>7</sup> (electronic source) dramatic monologues by historical figures.

The first blatant move toward a modern style – what Pound referred to as "nearer the bone" and "free of emotional slither" – came in 1913 with the publication of 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste' in *Poetry*. In this short essay Pound in fact offered 'A List of Don'ts for those beginning to

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Browning (1812-1889) was an English poet and playwright whose mastery of dramatic verse, especially dramatic monologues, made him one of the foremost Victorian poets. Browning is popularly known by his shorter poems, such as *Porphyria's Lover*, *My Last Duchess*, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, *How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix*, and *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*. His fame rests mainly on his dramatic monologues, in which the words not only convey setting and action but also reveal the speaker's character. Unlike a soliloquy, the meaning in his dramatic monologue is not what the speaker directly reveals but what he inadvertently "gives away" about himself in the process of rationalising past actions, or 'special-pleading' his case to a silent auditor in the poem.

write verses' (Pound, 1968: 4), outlining the tenets that would, in various forms, dominate not only his own aesthetic practice but most of the literary tradition of the West for the next half century. Verse, to Pound at this stage, became more like sculpture, something carved from alabaster, something done with craftsman quality and made to endure. Pound even offered a name for this new aesthetics: *imagism*.

American poet, essayist and translator Chad Davidson (2005: 405) notes that Ezra Pound's battle cry, *Make it new!*, became the implied motto for one of the most significant literary movements of the twentieth century. Modernism found its most fervent advocate in Pound and his numerous poems, essays, tracts, and manifestos, all of which sought to redefine poetry in light of a declining, late Victorian culture. Inspired early in his life by such varied sources as the Troubadours, Homer and the classical Greek canon, or Robert Browning, Pound condensed his learning and skills into highly concise and allusive verse. This move toward a rougher, more volatile poetics was, in part, a revolutionary's response to staid societal norms (Stead, 1986). Pound saw early twentieth-century poetry and the culture to which it belonged as rotten and sorely in need of classical revival under the pressure of a modern consciousness. His sense of timing, his shrewd business sense, and his knack for garnering the praise of other artists and important patrons guided him to the foreground of literary modernism in London. Pound helped William Butler Yeats mature, aided in William Carlos Williams' move toward modernism, promoted Robert Frost, and discovered T. S. Eliot, Hilda Doolittle, James Joyce, and countless others. Had Pound never written a word of verse, he would still command recognition in twentieth-century poetry. His own poetry, however – its stoic boldness, dramatic concisions, and haiku-like faithfulness to image – still demands attention and study (Kimmelman, 2005).

Pound's poetic idiom – one that emerged during the war years and took firm hold on him by the time of his departure for Paris in 1920 – displays concision, objectivity, and harsh juxtapositions. He forces readers to juggle his numerous allusions and cryptic comparisons. At his best Pound epitomizes verbal economy and imagistic precision. His rhyming of classical languages with English and his vast knowledge

and study of mediaeval forms and meter still loom large in the English poetic tradition. At his worst, however, Pound can be pedantic and overly allusive, relying on intimidation to force his readership into acknowledging his prowess (Stead, *op. cit.*).

While in voluntary exile in Italy in the 1920s and 1930s, Pound's obsession with constructing an artistic Utopia led him to fascist politics, harsh anti-Semitic rants, and ultimately to anti-American broadcasts during World War II. He vilified Jews and capitalism as the causes of cultural ruin in the West, and he supported overly optimistic economic systems. Ultimately Pound was detained by the American authorities after the liberation of Italy, and he was returned to the United States in 1945 under arrest for treason. He was later acquitted on the grounds of mental instability, and spent many years in St. Elizabeth's mental hospital in Washington, DC, where he received visits from young poets, such as Allen Ginsberg and Paul Blackburn.<sup>8</sup> (electronic source). Pound's Bollingen Prize for the *Pisan Cantos* in 1949 finally afforded his friends the opportunity to persuade authorities to release him. He was finally freed in 1957, and returned to Italy the following year.

Both admired and despised, idolized and vilified as the dominant figure of Modernism (Davidson, 2005), Ezra Loomis Pound was a technical genius and pivotal figure in world poetry, and certainly the iconoclast of his day (Snodgrass, 2000: 53).

## Conclusion

A century is a considerable period of time in the development of any literary genre. This is especially true in the case of American poetry,

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<sup>8</sup> The Pounds lived in Paris from 1921-1924, then settled in Rapallo, Italy, where they lived through the end of World War II. It was here that Pound worked on his epic *Cantos* and also began his turn towards Fascism. He wrote anti-Semitic essays blaming the Jews for both World Wars, and recorded many radio programs criticizing the US and President Franklin Roosevelt. For these he was indicted as a traitor *in absentia* in 1943, and soon after Germany surrendered he was imprisoned and then returned to the US. After a legal campaign to have him declared insane, he was kept at St. Elizabeth's Hospital until 1958.

which began the twentieth century as an enervated literary exercise and ended it as a vital form of cultural expression. American poets of the twentieth century pushed the limits of poetic composition, asking fundamental questions about what poetry is and how it should be written (Hamilton, 1994).

As the twentieth century began, poetry was greatly overshadowed by the novel. During the period from the end of the Civil War until World War I, the United States experienced explosive population growth and a powerfully expanding economy. As a result, the nation was focused on pragmatic matters that absorbed its immediate attention: American society had little energy to devote to the cultivation of poetry, which was often relegated to the status of a “genteel” pastime with little relevance to modern-day life. American poetry, on the other hand, lingered in the twilight of the late nineteenth century, unable to enter the modern world or break with the conventional formulas and sentimental diction of earlier decades (Myers, Wojahn, 1991).

Among the poets, Ezra Pound was perhaps the most strident voice for a poetry that would serve as a central expression of the new “modernist” aesthetics. In a 1912 essay, Pound declared “the imminence of an American Risorgimento”, a renaissance in American intellectual and artistic life that would lift the country out of its “Dark Ages” and propel it into contemporary civilization (Moody, 2007: 131). Such a renaissance was indeed to take place, largely as a result of the discovery of European culture by American poets. Some of those responding to American provinciality and cultural isolationism by leaving America for sojourns in Paris or London became permanent expatriates, the others returned to the United States, bringing with them an enlarged sense of European culture. American poets found a more receptive audience for their works in Europe than in the United States. The first books of Frost and Pound were all published abroad, where the public was more prepared for writing that did not conform to conventional nineteenth-century norms.

The experience of World War I, which brought many Americans into contact with Europe for the first time, further bridged the gap between American and European culture, and it prepared the ground for

an international modernism in which Americans would play a crucial part. The war was traumatic not only for the soldiers in the trenches but also for artists and writers whose sensitivity to the effects of warfare made them, as Pound put it, the “antennae of the race” (Pound, 1968: 297). In T. S. Eliot’s epoch-marking poem *The Waste Land*, a post-war world is evoked in which traditional systems of belief and established social structures had been radically altered.

The changed understanding of human society and human nature brought about by the war contributed to the large-scale literary and artistic movement known as “modernism”. The realities of war “presented a generation of judiciously limited lyric poets with an epic subject” (Longenbach, 1997) and caused a total rethinking of the purpose of poetry in the twentieth century. During the years 1920-1926 alone, American poets produced an extraordinary body of work, including Ezra Pound’s *Hugh Selwyn Mauberly* and *Cantos I-XVI*, T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, Wallace Stevens’ *Harmonium*, William Carlos Williams’ *Spring and All*, Marianne Moore’s *Observations* and *Poems*, Langston Hughes’ *The Weary Blues*, Edward E. Cummings’ *Tulips and Chimneys*, and Hart Crane’s *White Buildings*.

In many cases, Americans have failed even to recognize the genius of their own best poets (Beach, 2003: 5). William Carlos Williams for instance, now recognized as one of the leaders of the modernist movement and one of the central poets of the first half of the twentieth century, was underappreciated and rarely taught until the 1960s. With the passage of time, however, it becomes easier to make definitive judgments about the relative importance of different poets. In the first half of the twentieth century there is still a relatively small group of poets who dominate critical discussions of American poetic modernism. There may be admirers of Frost who think less highly of the work of Pound and Eliot, and vice versa, but by and large the study of modernist American poetry has focused on a canon of five or six central poets.

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## **РОБЕРТ ФРОСТ И ЕЗРА ПАУНД: СЛОЖЕНОСТ МИСЛИ И ОШТРИНА ИМАЖИЗМА**

**РЕЗИМЕ:** Америчка поезија првих деценија и целе прве половине двадесетог века без премца је по свом богатству, раскошној инвентивности и разноврсности. Укупна разноврсност поезије која је написана и објављена у Сједињеним Државама током двадесетог века представља јединствену експлозију књижевне креативности и плодотворног стваралаштва. Њен опсег форми, стилова, предмета који закупају пажњу и уметничку страст стваралаца просто је немогуће сагледати и сажето представити. Ствараоци, њихове преокупације и њихова дела бројем и квалитетом превазилазе све што би неки покушај приказа могао да каже о њима. Треба додати чињеницу да је и данас ту реч о једном пољу непрестаних промена – захваљујући напорима да се поезија чији су штампани појавни облици одавно распродати поново учини доступном читалачкој публици и промишљеној стручној анализи и критици, али и због тога што стручњаци непрестано откривају нове значајне примере поезије с почетка двадесетог века и из целе његове прве половине, који из најразличитијих могућих разлога до сада нису били штампани и представљени јавности. Запажања је вредна истина да су тек

у другој деценији двадесетог века песници кренули да се носе са значајним друштвеним и економским променама савременог доба, као што је увођење нових технологија у све области привређивања, нарочито у све индустријске гране и трговинску размену, као и све већа врева урбаног америчког живота. Првој генерацији америчких песника који су пружили свој одговор таквом модерном свету припадали су Роберт Фрост, Волас Стивенс, Езра Паунд, Вилијам Карлос Вилијамс, Т. С. Елиот, Едвард Е. Камингс и Маријана Мур. Сви припадници те генерације публиковали су своје прве књиге песама између 1908. и 1923. године, и управо су сви они својим делом означили да је прави уметнички домет америчког поетског стваралаштва заиста достигнут и успостављен. Међу нарочито истакнуте свакако се сврставају Роберт Фрост, доживљен као и личан и универзалан, истовремено и традиционалан и модеран, и Езра Паунд, славан по сложености мисли и оштрини захтеваног имајизма. Оно што те песнике чини значајним, међутим, није само њихово немирно поетско експериментисање. Сама мисао коју у своје стваралаштво улажу и коју стваралаштвом излажу чини Фроста и Паунда у великој мери заслужним и одговорним за уобличавање модернизма у његовој форми коју данас анализирамо и проучавамо. Они су били први теоретичари најважнијих и највећих питања која се већ традиционално доводе у везу с модернизмом – незаинтересованост наспрам активног политичког ангажовања, елитизам наспрам демократији, традиција суочена с новим, апстракција наспрам реализма. Фасцинација не много знаним књижевним традицијама коју испољавају ти песници, уз прихватање савремених филозофских поставки, довела је и до успостављања изванредно значајног и утицајног система књижевних вредности, снажно емитованих и ширених у њиховим критичким есејима и, често, кроз њихов редакторски и уреднички рад.

Кључне речи: *америчка поезија, модернизам, разноврсност, новине савременог доба, урбани тонови.*