**Imagism**

Imagism was a short-lived poetic movement which lasted from approximately 1909 to 1917, and was derived in part from the aesthetic philosophy of T. E. HULME. The term “imagism,” officially defined by F. S. FLINT and EZRA POUND in 1912, refers to an avoidance of romantic or symbolic abstraction in favor of a clear, precise presentation of the visual image. Imagism as a movement advocated the use of free rhythms, concreteness, and concision of both language and imagery. An imagist poem is typically short, and presents an image in as few words as possible, avoiding any additional commentary.

**Key Tenets of Imagism**

Imagist poets saw themselves as contemporaries of the POST-IMPRESSIONISTS and the FUTURISTS, though they maintained that they had “nothing in common with these schools,” as they had not published a manifesto, and their “only endeavor was to write in accordance with the best tradition, as they found it in the best writers of all time.” One of the primary influences on the development of imagism’s aggressive assertion of new poetic forms and subject matter while adhering to the standard of classical literature was Hulme’s essay “Romanticism and Classicism” (1911), in which he both rejected post-Renaissance humanism as sentimental and based on false premises, and predicted the rise of a new “dry, hard” verse; similarly, in the visual arts, Hulme advocated the more precise, abstract “geometrical” art of PABLO PICASSO and WYNDHAM LEWIS. Pound echoed Hulme’s denunciation of Romanticism in his call for “harder and saner” verse, “like granite.”

In March 1913, Flint and Pound set forth the four cardinal principles of “Imagisme” in the American review *Poetry*. They were:

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.

The fourth, a “Doctrine of the Image,” remained unpublished and unexplained, as Flint and Pound maintained that it “did not concern the public.”

**Conception and Origins**

The first printed mention of the imagist movement was in Pound’s Prefatory Note to “The Complete Poetical Works of T. E. Hulme,” included at the end of his *Ripostes* (1912); these five poems appended to Pound’s book are frequently considered the formal initiation of the imagist movement. In his Prefatory Note, Pound refers to “Les Imagistes” as the descendants of the “School of Images,” a group of poets brought together by Hulme in 1909 to discuss poetics, in particular vers libre and haiku. In 1914, the first anthology of imagist poetry, *Des Imagistes*, was published; the volume was edited by Pound and contained the work of eleven poets, including RICHARD ALDINGTON, H. D., Flint, SKIPWITH CANNELL, AMY LOWELL, WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS, JAMES JOYCE, Pound, FORD MADOX FORD, ALLEN UPWARD, and JOHN COURNOS. In May 1915, *The Egoist* published a “Special Imagist Number” which included poems by Aldington, H. D., JOHN GOULD FLETCHER, Flint, D. H. LAWRENCE, Lowell, MARIANNE MOORE, and MAY SINCLAIR. Also in 1915, Lowell published her own imagist anthology, *Some Imagist Poets*, which she prefaced with an essay that outlined six guiding principles of imagism that differed greatly from Pound’s conception of imagist poetry. Following the publication of Lowell’s essay and anthology, Pound disassociated himself from imagism as a creative movement. Lowell published two additional imagist anthologies in 1916 and 1917; the end of the imagist movement is typically marked by Lowell’s final anthology.

**Key Reference Works**

Flint, F. S. “Imagisme.”

Hulme, T. E. *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art.*

Lowell, Amy, ed. *Some Imagist Poets*.

Pound, Ezra. “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste.”