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Fir-Flower Petals on a Wet, Black Bough: Constructing New Poetry through Asian Aesthetics in  
Early Modernist Poets

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in English Literature

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by  
Matthew Gilbert  
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Dr. Jesse Graves, Chair  
Dr. Matthew Fehskens  
Dr. Mark Holland

Keywords: American Literature, Comparative Literature, Imagism, East-Western, Haiku, Hokku,  
Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams

## ABSTRACT

Fir-Flower Petals on a Wet Black Bough: Constructing New Poetry through Asian Aesthetics in

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Critics often credit Ezra Pound and his Imagist movement for the development of American poetics. Pound's interest in international arts and minimalist aesthetics of cross-cultural poetry gained the attention of prominent writers throughout Modernist and Post-Modern periods. From writers like Wallace Stevens and Gertrude Stein to later poets like Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder, image and precise language has shaped American literature. Few critics have praised Eastern cultures or the Imagist poets who adopted an East-Western form of poetics: Amy Lowell and William Carlos Williams. Studying traditional Eastern painting and short-form poetry and interactions with personal connections to the East, Lowell and Williams adapt then progress aesthetic fusions Pound began and abandoned through his interpretation of Eastern art. Like Pound, Lowell and Williams illustrate a mix of form, free-verse language, and modernized poetics to not only imitate Eastern art but to create poetics of international discourse which shape American Modernism.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Thought tends to collect in pools.”

– Wallace Stevens

The beginning of American Modernism found in its writers a fixation with creating an authentic voice for literature of the English-speaking world. American Modernists, much like many Modernist writers around the world, sought to establish a writing which surprised, intrigued, and contrasted the poetic values laid down by tradition – Americans, specifically, pursued poetry which broke from the traditions set by the Victorian and Romantic English poets. Because American literature of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century still bore the label of “English literature” at the time, Modernists worked to create a distinct aesthetic for American writers, working to reconstruct aesthetics through the cult of the new. Octavio Paz, poetry critic and writer, suggests in his book *Children of the Mire* that Modernity is a “polemic tradition which displaces the tradition of the moment” (1) and postulates that its “differentness is negation – the knife which splits time in two: before and now” (4). He writes of Modernity that “there are periods when the rule is the ‘imitation of the Ancients,’ others which glorify novelty and surprise” (2), yet many Western critics ignore the possibility of overlap between the two. The Modernist is amphibious in nature and works to live between two worlds; therefore, the overlap generates interest through both novelty and traditional fusion.

The American Imagist movement, credited by poet T.S. Eliot as the first “organized English movement” (Eliot 1953), rejected sentiment and discursiveness found in Victorian and Romantic works. In place of these traditions, aesthetics focused on an economy and directness of language, seeking new ways to construct form and meaning through a focus on a singular image.

These poets sought to establish a return to classical movements, to bring together the past and present through works culminating from ancient traditions and a united world – a world where Eastern and Western arts meet. While critics often credit the Imagist movement as the most influential movement of American modernism, few evaluate the Eastern influences which help to frame the work. Three prominent American Imagists – Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, and William Carlos Williams – emphasize the fusion of Eastern and Western art, drawing on their aesthetic understanding of classical Chinese and Japanese works, through translation, to create a poetic Modernity, both ancient and new, then positions American poetry as an observation and an internalization of the individual and the concrete image as a fundamental requirement of art. These Imagists produce an aesthetic fusion of cross-cultural exchange and set a foundation for American poetics formed through the exploration of the humanities of East-Western discourse.

### *Historical Frame*

In his article “The Transcultural Roots of Modernism: Imagist Poetry, Japanese Visual Culture, and the Western Museum System” (2011), Rupert Richard Arrowsmith explores a hybridization of Japanese and Western visual arts. He writes, “For more than three decades, Japan had enjoyed under the regime of the Meiji Emperor an openness to international influences that had been systematically denied by the *sakoku*, or ‘closed country,’ policy of the Tokugawa Shogunate that preceded it” (Arrowsmith 27). His exploration positions these amalgamations as more than mere imitations, just as the exploration of newness in American Modernity intersperses the influences of Japanese and Chinese aesthetics to fashion hybrid forms and poetic structures in the works of Imagists such as Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, and William Carlos Williams. Situating these early Modernist writers in historical context through epistolaries,

critics have drawn connections between Eastern visual art forms and density of words with the Imagist movement.

Resulting from a growing interest in Eastern art, French writers explored the ascetics of Japanese arts, focusing on the brevity and concreteness often demonstrated in the visual arts. As stated by Gary L. Brower, “an interest in Japanese literature had been evolving in England, based on influences of French exoticism and the translations and studies of a group of scholarly orientalist” (32). Other Western writers such as Basil Hall Chamberlain, Claude Maitre, Louis Aubert also wrote about or translated works of *waka* from Japanese literature, appealing to the demand of a Western adaptation of Eastern Art (Agostini “The Development of French Haiku...”).

Japan also grew through interaction with the Western world following the end of their closed-borders policy. Novelty, or Paz’s term: “newness,” would incite fascination with the Western world, and Japan would embrace conventions of Europe through all mediums of art: architecture, painting, and writing. All aspects of artistic fusion became fashionable among the urban landscape of an industrialized Japan. Arrowsmith states that “However infectious this fashion was, however, its products should not be seen as imitations of European styles, but rather as hybrid adaptations that anticipate the Western experiments with Japanese aesthetics that would follow them (2). Examples of East-West fusions in Japanese literature can be traced to critics and authors like Tsubouchi Shoyo, who relied on “labyrinth plotting conventions of Tokugawa literature” while adopting Western realistic aesthetics in his 1885 work *Shosetsu Shinzui* (Arrowsmith 28). Unlike the French, Japanese writers embraced industrialization, resulting in a reformation of Japanese literature, such as poetry.



In his essay “*The Japanese Haiku, Its Essential Nature, History, and Possibilities in English*,” Kenneth Yuseida quotes critic Asaji Nose (1894-1955), writing that Basho “tried his utmost to master the hidden aspects of nature and to reveal its secrets. What he tried to find was not the outward appearance of nature, but to touch its very heart” (22). This outward appearance of nature has some connection to the English Romantics who often connect speaker with nature, yet what the poets like Basho seek in their poetry is the way nature touches the heart. Author and critic R.H. Blyth writes that the tradition of *haiku* is an aesthetic and a way of life (*Haiku* 162) closely tied with Zen, Buddhism, Taoism, Shinto, poetry, and nature, so in a modern, urbanizing world, short-form poetry finds itself in liminality of past and present. Through this liminal space, Japanese poetry begins to break away from tradition, for an adherence to the seasonal and natural aesthetics contrasts the *heart* of modern life. Like American Modernists seeking to reform poetic traditions, Japanese Modernists worked to create novelty of the urban life, an East-Western cross-cultural urbanization.

#### *Pre-Imagist and Cross-Continent Literature*

At the Poets’ Club<sup>1</sup> meeting, poet T.E. Hulme expressed an expectation for the decay of tradition in his “Lecture on Modern Poetry” (1908), citing the Parnassian poets of France who “stressed restraint, objectivity, technical perfection, and precise description” as a reaction to the emotion and imprecision of the Romantics (Tanabe 37). While Hulme acknowledges the short-

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<sup>1</sup> The Poet’s Club was founded in 1908 by the banker Henry Simpson. T.E. Hulme, often considered the “father of imagism,” helped establish the club, acting as secretary, to provide a space for writers to give readings of poetry and the presentation of papers on topics of poetry. Critic Cyrene N. Pondrom notes that contrary to assertions by critics like William Pratt, “the credit for the first publication of imagist poems clearly rests with the Poets’ Club (101).

lived impact of the movement, crediting writers like Monde<sup>2</sup> and René François Armand (Sully) Prudhomme with working against Romanticism; he points to the movement's rise and decline as fertile ground for newness which impacted international Modernism. Hulme's exploration of French literature would lead him to explore a Western literature adapting Eastern styles and aesthetics because of a reopened Japan.

Hulme would leave Poet's Club to meet with poet and critic F.S. Flint, who championed free-verse and modern French poetry, at the Eiffel Tower and begin a second group which would be referred to by Hulme as the "secession club" (Williams 16). While in meeting, the writers of secession club would continue Hulme's interest in poetic reform through free-verse and precise verbiage which relied heavily on exploring Eastern *waka*<sup>3</sup> such as *tanka*<sup>4</sup> and *haiku*<sup>5</sup>. For Hulme, the modern writer's poetry does not necessitate form for there is no absolute truth, and the modern poet should seek the "introspective . . . expression and communication of the poet's mind" (Hulme "Lecture of Modern Poetry"). The resulting shift away from Romanticism would result in an exploration of poetic expectations and new verse. While Hulme makes clear that he is more concerned with English than French, his example of French poetry and the reaction to

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<sup>2</sup> While this name appears in Hulme's recorded lecture, I find no information when researching this poet. I did however find poet Mendes mentioned among the Parnassians. I am unsure whether to attribute this to mistranslation or an error on Hulme's understanding of the movement.

<sup>3</sup> Short-form Japanese verse poetry. For more information on the development of the haiku from traditional forms, see Hakutani, Ch. 1 "The Genesis and Development of Haiku in Japan."

<sup>4</sup> Tanka is a literary form of waka which maintains a 32-syllable count composed in a 5/7/5/7/7 structure. Much like the sonnet, the tanka was composed of sections. The opening section, or the hokku, serves as the "upper section" (*kami-no-ku*, 上の句) which connects to the "lower phrase" (*shimo-no-ku*, 下の句) through the turn of the poem, or a pivotal image. Its "upper section" would be used as the basis for the invention of the modern *haiku*.

<sup>5</sup> Masaoka Shiki, Japanese critic and poet, revitalized the tanka form in the early twentieth century, stating that "waka should be renewed and modernized" (Beichman). He adapts the stand-alone hokku used by Basho, renaming it *haiku* from the term *haiki no renga*.

formal restraints impacts much of what would become staples to international Modernism, particularly the American Imagists.

In 1908 American poet Ezra Pound's attendance at the secession club meeting would propel Hulme's expectations for Modernism forward. Like Hulme's lecture, Pound evaluates the flux of poetic aspirations, evaluating the necessity of form and restraint in early poetry of the Greeks who strived to immortalize a moment or absolute truth. Similarly, Pound finds in his own expectations a need to immortalize the moment. In 1912 Ezra Pound founded the Imagist movement through the adaptation of the aesthetic ideas of T.E. Hulme. This represents a strand of Modernity which analyzes, adapts, and reconstructs poetic form and language, drawing on elements of Eastern poetics in opposition to Occidental culture. The West often regards the word "asceticism" with suspicion – while "askesis" in ancient Greek refers to discipline, it often overexpresses in ties to Christianity. Blyth points out that by asceticism, Japanese poets develop the spirit of *haiku* asceticism as "selflessness, loneliness, grateful acceptance, wordlessness, non-intellectuality, contradiction, humor, freedom, non-morality, simplicity, materiality, love, and courage" (162). Pound draws from the Eastern concept of the ascetic while enhancing it with the immortalized moment of the Greek. While later American *haiku* poets would respect the binary opposites of East and West, the early American modernists honored the historical, cultural overlap between the two.

### *Aesthetics and Expectations*

Most critics approach their work from a Western perspective, and the culture and aesthetics from which these poets drew inspiration are often lost. They hold American Modernists, who draw so heavily from the expressiveness of Eastern arts, as revolutionaries of

new poetics, yet neglect to recognize authenticity of their sourcing or application of those aesthetics. As such, Western readers should recognize and credit the writers and elements of Asian-language poetics which shaped an American Modernity. In his book *Orientalism, Modernism, and the American Poem*, literary critic Robert Kern surveys the associations of Chinese language with the concreteness of verse language that Imagists sought to achieve. The Imagist movement, which sought to write in opposition to the abstraction of Western poetry, drew upon three rules outlined by Ezra Pound in “A Retrospect” (1912). These rules were the conclusion of Pound’s conversation with H.D. and Hulme:

1. Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective;
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation;
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome” (Pound).

Correspondences with Orientalist Ernest Fenollosa and Japanese poet Yone Noguchi frequently presented Pound with opportunities to embrace the brevity and metonymy of Asian language poetry. As a result, Pound’s Modernism drew on elements of Asian language poetry, both formally and structurally, impacting the works of his contemporaries’ Imagism, among them Amy Lowell, who took up the mantle of Imagism after Pound’s abandonment, and William Carlos Williams. Pound, Lowell, and Williams studied Asian poetry, each drawing from individual connections to translation, culminating in a Modernist aesthetic that interspersed elements of *haiku*: succinct imagery, precise language, and semantic markers acknowledged as a requirement for Eastern short-forms.

In demonstrating the make-up of the traditional *hokku* (still confused by American Modernist writers with the more modern term *haiku*), Zen teacher Robert Aitken explores the

impact of “cutting words” (*kireji* きれじ) in Basho’s poem “The Old Pond” which reads in

Japanese and English:

Furu ike ya	Old pond!
Kawazu tobikomu	frog jumps in
Mizu no oto	water’s sound

Aitken writes of the cutting word (semantic marker): “や, or *Ya* (italicized for my emphasis), is a cutting word that separates and yet joins the expressions before and after. It is punctuation that marks a transition – a particle of anticipation” (3). With the cutting word *ya*, the reader can draw a continued connection between nature and the poet. The frog permeates the water, disrupting the silence and changing the moment for the listener. This moment demonstrates Blyth’s “way of life” through the economy of words and precise imagery, while also meeting all three of Imagists’ rules; therefore, *waka* became a central interest to many of Imagists, particularly the founder, Ezra Pound. The juxtaposition of stillness in the pond with the movement of the frog stands as another aesthetic of Japanese *waka* for the poet observes the change of past and present. In terms of Paz’s interpretation of Modernity, the poet sits between the stillness that was and the sound that is yet will cease in future. The poet treats the image with directness and captures the scene for the moment that it is, drawing on the philosophical Zen of the *haiku*. Little criticism has delved into the impacts of Zen art philosophy or “cutting words” on American Modernist or the Imagist movement, yet the impact of those Eastern aesthetics set the foundation for what American poetry expects to achieve.

## CHAPTER 2

### YONE NOGUCHI AND EZRA POUND: EAST-WESTERN EXPLORATION AND THE NEW IMAGE

Ezra Pound shares many aesthetic similarities with Yone Noguchi and is often credited for having influenced Noguchi's work through his Modernism. In his article "Ezra Pound, Yone Noguchi, and Imagism" cross-cultural literary critic Yoshinobu Hakutani writes of Pound and Noguchi:

Despite the active dialogues that occurred between Pound and Noguchi, critics have not seriously considered their relationship. The only critic who has mentioned Noguchi in discussing the imagist movement regarded him not as a poet and critic from whose ideas Pound might have benefited but as one of the poets whom Pound himself influenced.

(Hakutani 53)

While this oversight does not get much attention outside of Hakutani's analyses, it demonstrates a problematic approach to literary criticism, one that posits the success of Western integration over cultural integrity. In the anthology *Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2004) edited by Dana Gioia, the introduction to Imagism, positions London "as a place where American and British poets met and influenced each other (Ezra Pound, Robert Frost, T. S. Eliot, Yone Noguchi, H.D., and Conrad Aiken . . .)" (86) yet equal ground is not established throughout the section on Early Modernism: From Imagism to High Modernism. In the section dedicated to Ezra Pound, the text explores a range of international explorations on Pound's part (such as translation, Noh drama, and Chinese poetry), yet there is no mention of Yone Noguchi's influence. While Noguchi's biographical introduction makes mention of Noguchi's correspondences with Pound and W.B. Yeats, the text diminishes Noguchi's impact, stating, "Noguchi, therefore, played an important but little-known role in influencing the development of

Imagism” (107). Despite recognizing the influence of Japanese art on Pound’s movement, Western critics gloss over its significance due to a lack of understanding and interest in the culture or structures of Eastern short-form poetry.

In the summer of 1911, Pound received an unexpected letter from Japan, postmarked July 16, 1911 from Japan

Dear Mr. Pound

As I think you may not know my work at all, I send you, under a separate cover, my new book of poems called *The Pilgrimage* As I [am] not yet acquainted with your work, I wish you will send your book or books which you like to have me read This little not<sup>6</sup> may sound quite businesslike, but I can promise you that I can do better in my next letter to you

Yours truly,

Yone Noguchi

P S I am anxious to read not only your poetical work but also your criticism (Kodama 4)

Pound acknowledged the receipt of Noguchi’s book, stating that he recognizes the book covers but had neglected to read the work beforehand. The book which both poets mention, published in 1909, makes no appearance in the criticism of Western writers like Gioia, yet contained six hokku from which Pound could draw aesthetic inspiration.

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<sup>6</sup> This is an error of the word note on Noguchi’s part.

Prior to *The Pilgrimage*, Noguchi had published two other books of poetry, *Seen and Unseen* (1897) and *The Voice of the Valley* (1897), which were self-published, yet received critical acclaim for freshness. His next two collections *From the Eastern Sea* (1903) and *The Summer Cloud* (1906) infused more Japanese aesthetics through style and structure (Gioia 105). Among the poems from his book, “To an Unknown Poet” and “My Poetry” demonstrate a movement into the novelty of nature in Noguchi’s work. In his book *Zen and Japanese Culture* (1938), D.T. Suzuki writes that “IT IS impossible to speak of Japanese culture apart from Buddhism” (217) because the influence of Buddhism permeates every aspect of Japanese culture. The influence is so pervasive that it emanates from the subconscious of the mind; most live their day to day lives without recognizing it. Suzuki claims that since the sixteenth century Buddhism has served as the agent of cultural advancement and political consolidation (217); therefore, as a Japanese writer many of those elements appear in Noguchi’s poetry, and by extension, seep into the work of Imagists influenced by his legacy. Both of Noguchi’s poems demonstrate a connectiveness to nature which parallels the motions of the poet’s mind. Noguchi’s “To an Unknown Poet” moves from “the deep body of / the mist on the hill” (1-2) to “I the god upon the face of the deep, deep- / less deepness in the Beginning?” (5-6) drawing on the Zen foundation of the *waka* where the observer experiences the sparseness of the moment through song. This concise structure would later parallel aesthetics explored through the work of Imagist writers.

Noguchi pushed for cross-cultural exploration through his critical work in articles like “A Proposal for American Poets” (1904) where he urged American poets to “try Japanese hokku” (Noguchi 248). He opens his essay:

Hokku (seventeen-syllable poem) is like a tiny star, mind you, carrying the whole sky at its back. It is like a slightly-open door, where you may steal into the realm of poesy. It is



simply a guiding lamp. Its value depends on how much it suggests. The Hokku poet's chief aim is to impress the reader with the high atmosphere in which he is living.

(Noguchi)

Noguchi's simile illustrates much about the Zen aesthetics embedded into hokku through both form and culture and frames a deepness beneath the surface of the text. Literary critic Robert Aitken, in his *A Zen Wave*, illustrates an aesthetic of Zen poetics through a filtration of aesthetic traditions in the *hokku* of Matsuo Basho. Aitken asserts that Basho's Zen influences can be traced through seasonal phrases (which become a part of the *hokku* and other linked-verse forms) and structures yet acknowledges that to some Basho cannot be classified as a Zen poet because he would not recommend *zazen*<sup>7</sup> and wore the robe of Zen monks as a tradition to the *hokku* poets of the time (xviii). It is through the connection between nature and man, where the mind experiences the fresh and new where Aitken defines Basho's poetry as Zen poetry. This freshness and newness would appeal to Ezra Pound, who looked to create a cult of the new through fusing together the ancient Japanese form with the modern experience.

In his poem "In a Station of the Metro" Pound demonstrates language of precision and connects the bustling urbanism of America to the images of nature often found in Noguchi's work and Asian poetry. His use of the colon to separate the urban image from the metonymic elements of spring cuts the juxtaposition of the Western and Eastern aesthetics in a noticeable, yet effective way much like the cutting word *ya*. By establishing the juxtaposition required in

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<sup>7</sup> In "Zazen is not the Same as Meditation" Isshou Fujita writes of *zazen*. "For Dogen, on the other hand, the objective of *zazen* is just to sit in *kekka-fuza* correctly—there is absolutely nothing to add to it. It is *kekka-fuza* plus zero. Kodo Sawaki Roshi, the great Zen master of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Japan, said, 'Just sit *zazen*, and that's the end of it'" (37).

Eastern *haiku*, Pound creates the hybrid form which grounds the reader in the moment, or what he calls in his essay “Vorticism” the vortex of imagery. Pound writes in a *hokku*-like sentence:

The apparition of these faces in the crowd:

Petals on a wet, black bough (1-2).

Much like Basho’s *hokku*, Pound’s poem is implicit of the elements of Japanese poetry through super-positioned<sup>8</sup> elements of nature and the juxtaposed urban landscape. The directness of expression is derived from Pound’s understanding of nineteenth-century French prose as discussed in a lecture by T. E. Hulme. Pound’s fusion of the terseness with the aesthetics of superposition showcases an exploration of an East-West art. In his essay, “Vorticism,” Pound attributes the art of writing to the art of painting, positioning the writer as a painter and the *image* as the pigment from whom which the poem blossoms.

In defining what an image represents, Pound states that it “may be a sketch, a vignette, a criticism, an epigram or anything else you like. It may be impressionism, it may even be very good prose” (469-70). This concept of the sketch too-closely resembles Noguchi’s “tiny star” – published in 1914, ten years after Noguchi’s proposal – in that a sketch does not reveal the entirety of the experience but a slight suggestion to impress the atmosphere of modern living experience. Pound’s immediate experience is simple yet evocative in that his revelation is the image of the faces – nameless and realistic of experience of urban life. The image “transforms itself, darts into a thing inward and subjective” (467), into the “petals on a wet, black bough” (2). Alongside Pound’s famous metro poem, “Vorticism” quotes another *hokku* poet, Moritaki, whose own poem seems to have inspired Pound’s finished form.

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<sup>8</sup> In his essay “Vorticism,” Pound describes super-position as a stacking of images. This idea is taken from the was short-form Eastern forms stack images to juxtapose them through form.

The fallen blossom flies back to its branch:

A butterfly (“Vorticism 467).

Hakutani purports that the Japanese version of Moritaki’s poem had been included in Noguchi’s book *The Spirit of Japanese* (1914), written in the traditional three-line structure, then translated by Noguchi himself. Noguchi maintained the three-line structure in translation.

Rak-ka eda ni	I thought I saw the fallen leaves
Kaeru to mireba	Returning to their branches:
Kocho-o kana (Moritaki)	Alas, butterflies were they (Noguchi)

As noted by Hakutani, Pound’s poem mirrors that of Noguchi’s translation through structure and language choice. The use of the colon and the repeated words “fallen,” “broken,” and “butterfly” (77) is undeniable. The superposition<sup>9</sup> and the colon which cuts into the juxtaposed images illustrates Pound’s undeniable familiarity with Noguchi’s translation, and by extension, Noguchi’s work as a whole. In exploring the potential functions of the *image*, Pound mimics the aesthetics and critical expectations of the *image* in ways reminiscent of Noguchi’s poetics from his essay “What is a Hokku Poem?” (Originally published as “Hokku” 1912). The clear similarities, Hakutani argues, illustrate the influence Noguchi had on shaping both Pound’s modernity and his understanding of Eastern poetry.

Poems like Pound’s “Alba” and “Fan Piece, for her Imperial Lord” seem much closer to the traditional form of *hokku* in terms of character count with a 7 / 7 / 8 count and 7 / 5 / 7 count respectively. This adherence to character count contrasts many of Noguchi’s *hokku* which do not try to adhere to character count (Hakutani 79). This interest in character count demonstrates

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<sup>9</sup> With Pound’s interest in removing the unnecessary, the compacted superposition into three lines rather than two would serve to better represent what Pound would have considered the simplicity of the subjective.

Pound's need to reform poetry, to create an art form of the highest degree, whereas Noguchi tends to demonstrate a better understanding of Japanese translation as an Eastern critic and poet. Unlike with Japanese, English syllables cannot contain the same meaning as the Japanese *-On*; therefore, Noguchi works more effectively within his confinement for English *hokku* to characterize the experience of an English-speaking moment.

On September 2, 1911 Pound responded to Noguchi's letter, asserting "Of your country I know almost nothing – surely if the east & west are ever to understand each other that understanding must come slowly & come through the arts" (Kodama 5). Pound's letter indicates an interest in the growing East-West exchange of arts, yet Hakutani questions the validity of Pound's ignorance due to his ties to the Succession Club of Paris and ties to T. E. Hulme, F. S. Flint, and Richard Aldington who explored *haiku* and *tanka*. As a Japanese literary critic, Noguchi had compared the poet Basho to the "modern French poet Stephane Mallarme [who] also left a small quantity of literary works and is called a great poet of small works in that he is a poet of rare nobility of character like Basho (Kiuchi 23). As T.E. Hulme had studied the French Parnassians, such as Mallarme, whose work inspired his move for reform of English-language poetry, Pound's comment on knowing of Japan's history and cultural literary would be humble at best, untruthful at worst. Noguchi's influence impacted, both directly and indirectly, writers like Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, and T.S. Eliot, whose poem "Doris's Dream Songs" appear in Harold Monro's 1924 *The Chapbook* alongside Noguchi's poem "A Kinsington Idyll" (Nagahata). Noguchi taught at Oxford, lecturing on *haiku* and *haiku* poet Basho. Through his work, Pound found an aesthetic of language and newness that had not been adopted in American poetry and one that would blend with his Imagist movement.

From the succession club, Pound and Yeats would explore another Japanese art form, the Noh theater, a form that both artists took notice of at Noguchi's suggestion. In the preface to James Logenbach's *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats, and Modernism*, Logenbach states that "Pound, who had just received the Fenollosa<sup>10</sup> papers, began translating Noh plays. Yeats read the translation and was inspired to make a new start with his own drama" (xi). While Pound's poetry concisely positions language and restrictive forms, Yeats was the better student of the spiritual side of Noh. This connection would not be lost on the work of either artist: Pound combines his minimalist feeling of experience with his study of short-forms to create his early creations of near-authentic *hokku* poems and Yeats' would capture the physical-spiritual connections between land and body. Noh would inspire much of the aesthetics of Pound and Yeats whose poem "The Old Men Admiring Themselves in the Water," demonstrates a juxtaposition of the symbolism of water and spirit, land and body, which transcends the genre and would later grow into his play *At the Hawk's Well*. While symbolism played a great role in both genres, it was through his plays that Yeats most effectively fuses East and West.

T.S. Eliot who was exposed to Yeats' *Noh plays*<sup>11</sup> wrote his most famous poem "The Wasteland" (1922), using the symbolism of imagery to illustrate a Modernism contrived of Eastern cultural appropriation. Unlike Pound's interpretation of Eastern aesthetics, "The Wasteland" distorts time by stripping away the land and presenting the bareness of Modernity, relying on symbolism and allusions to makes connections rather than allowing the *image* to exist

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<sup>10</sup> Earnest Fenollosa's study of Japanese Noh was imperfect so much of the traditional aesthetics would be lost in translation, yet much of Pound's and Yeats' own fusion of East-Western art comes from their loose understanding.

<sup>11</sup> Critics consider Yeats' Noh plays to be plays influenced through the tradition of Japanese Noh. While these plays are loosely demonstrative of minimal design and have been stated by Yeats' himself to have been influenced by Noh, these aesthetics go unexplored by many Western critics.

on its own. These interpretations highlight a dissonance in the structural understanding of Eastern aesthetics much like a French critical lens, a limited view that pre-Imagist Hulme originally held. This interest in symbolism also juxtaposes the varying interpretations of Eastern aesthetics by colleagues Yeats and Eliot with those of a more exploratory fusions of Lowell and Williams.

In his essay “Pound, Noguchi, and Imagism” Hakutani makes a clear assessment of conflicting interpretations of what *the image*<sup>12</sup> represents to Pound and contemporary W.B. Yeats, who also corresponded with Noguchi. Both poets’ correspondences with Noguchi illustrate a vastly different understanding of the poetic aesthetics which use the *image*. Hakutani writes of these contrasting views:

Even though Yeats dedicated his noh play *At the Hawk’s Well* to Pound, Yeats was not enthusiastic about Pound’s modernist poetics. The difference between Pound and Yeats revealed itself in the two modernist poets’ differing views of the Japanese noh play. A symbolist and spiritualist poet, Yeats was fascinated by the noh play, which stages not a realistic and elaborate but a symbolic and spiritual setting, while Pound, an Imagist, was interested not in particular images and symbols but in the unifying effect a noh play produces on the stage. (3)

While Pound had attended the succession club in Paris and likely studied the French Parnassians alongside Hulme and Flint, Pound found through his experimentation a poetics of the moment and the image. Yeats’ impression of Noh was that it appealed to aristocracy, a historical tradition that he continued to strive for through the performances of his of plays for Lady Gregory’s

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<sup>12</sup> *Image* throughout will be used to define the aesthetic representation of how the poet’s subject matter, or poet’s image, will function to meet poetic expectations in Imagism and *haiku*

literary group. While Yeats' history is accurate, Pound's poetry differs because of his attentive studies of other Japanese art forms. Much like Noh theater, *hokku* originally served literate upper classes, but began to include general masses with the development of late Zen aesthetics. During this time, allusions fell out of favor and the experience of humor and comprehension took precedence. Pound's understanding of this development through form would shape his understanding of the Eastern *image* as demonstrated in his metro poem which relies on directness uninhibited by allusions and verbiage.

Though Noguchi had inspired Yeats to explore the Noh and Japanese *hokku*, only Pound, of the two, explored the depths of a variety of mediums beneath the text and created poetry of East-Western fusion. While some critics pose a question of correlation between Yeats and the influence his work had on Pound, Pound's work develops much more effectively and much differently. Japanese *haiku*, and the poetry of contemporary Japanese poets like Noguchi, capture that image or moment in time. The distortion of time creates a moment for the reader to engage the image or object without the interjection of abstract thinking which Romantics implored prior to Modernism. The liminality trended through Modernism across the globe, appearing in works by writers such as Rainer Maria Rilke, T.S. Eliot, and Samuel Beckett. It extended beyond genre and situated Modernist writing in an aesthetic distortion where writers sought out to create new, while still drawing on past aesthetics such as *haiku*. While his later poems would not adhere so authentically to Japanese aesthetics, much of his understanding would be passed along to Imagists like Amy Lowell and William Carlos Williams.

## CHAPTER 3

### AMY LOWELL, FIR-FLOWER TABLETS, AND EAST-WEST CADENCE

A Boston socialite and poet late to the Imagist movement, Amy Lowell, sought out Ezra Pound in London 1913 after the journal *Poetry* fashioned a volume of the “New Poetry” which included poems by H.D. and introduced expositions of a new movement, Imagism by Pound (Gioia 98). Pound’s “A Few Don’ts by an Imagist” (1912) would appeal to Lowell whose earlier work, *A Dome of Many-Colored Glass* (1912) while considered “perfectly acceptable poetry,” also garnered criticism for failing “to excite or arouse the reader, even to anger” (Gould 108). Gould points to Louis Utermeyers, whose critical views paralleled a line of Modern thought that Paz contemplates as essential to the Modernism of the early 1900s. Paz writes, “What distinguishes our modernity from that of other ages is not our cult of the new and surprising, important though it is, but the fact that it is a rejection, a criticism of immediate past, an interruption of continuity” (3). This criticism of immediate past reflects the aesthetics of Lowell’s first collection of poetry, which Lowell recognizes after its reception. Through Lowell’s understanding poetic shifts, she seeks to supplement her own poetry with freshness and negation of the Romantic aesthetics.

Upon return from meeting Pound, Lowell would publish her poetry in *Poetry*, the *Egotist*, and Pound’s anthology of Imagist poetry, *Des Imagistes*, as well as publishing her second book of poetry, *Sword Blades and Poppy Seeds* (1914). During her second trip to London in July 1914 Lowell would surmount the modernist movement which Pound had abandoned for the Vorticism movement. In a short three months, Lowell had managed to win over the support of all the other Imagist poets except Pound, who “scoffed at Lowell’s determination to promote a movement he considered moribund” (Gioia 98). Her determination though, would lead Lowell to



edit three more Imagist anthologies and publish more work. Publication of her book *Sword Blades and Poppy Seeds* would draw the attention of Pound who threatened to sue Lowell's publisher for citing her as "the foremost member of the Imagistes" (Bradshaw xi-xxvi). This conflict would lead to the opposition between Pound and Lowell with Pound dubbing her version of Modernity as Amy-ism – a post-Imagist interpretation of the *image* that gave up quality for marketability. In his essay "'At the Mercy of Editorial Selection:' Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, and the Imagist Anthologies" literary critic Paul Bradley Bellow contemplates the lack of positive critical research on Lowell. He attributes the literary narrative as the result of Pound's skewed representation of Lowell through his letters and essays (25). By exploring the poetry of Amy Lowell through an Eastern-Western lens rather than Pound's perspective, critics can evaluate Lowell's work as its own post-Japonism manifestation of modern discourse.

As a product of the Japonism craze, from a young age Lowell maintained an interest in the "orient," recognizing herself as "of adulation of all things orient"<sup>13</sup>. Her interest blossomed through gifts her brother Percival had brought to her from his travels to Japan during the Japanese craze. Her brother further sparked her interest by publishing four books on the east<sup>14</sup> that he had written by the time Amy was twenty-one years old (Munich xxxiii). This adoration for Eastern art would draw Lowell's interest to work with long-time friend Florence Ayscough, whom Lowell had met at Mrs. Quincy Shaw's School in Brookline, Massachusetts at about nine years old. Florence Wheelock Ayscough, an author and Chinese historian, helped to kindle Lowell's fascination with the Asian cultures. Their correspondences (Macnair) record the

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<sup>13</sup> Qtd in *Foster Damon, Amy Lowell: A Chronicle*. Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966, pg. 329; Reqtd in "The Intertextual Travel of Amy Lowell" by Yunte Huang.

<sup>14</sup> *Noto: An Unexplored Corner of Japan* (1891); *Occult Japan, or the Way of the Gods*(1894); *Chosön: The Land of the Morning Calm* (1886); and *Orient, The Soul of the Far East* (1888), his most popular book.

preparation, editing, and publication of a collection of Chinese-to-English poetry *Fir-Flower Tablets*, where Ayscough would transcribe the poetry of early Chinese poets like Li Po and Lu Yu and Lowell would transform the transcriptions into poetry and polyphonic prose<sup>15</sup>.

Lowell took a liking to the polyphonic prose which she describes in the preface for *Can Grande's Castle* as:

... the freest, the most elastic of all forms, for it follows at will any, and all, of the rules which guide other forms. Metrical verse has one set of laws, cadence verse another; 'polyphonic prose' can go from one to the other in the same poem with no sense of incongruity (Munich xxxv).

This style, taken from French symbolist Paul Fort, demonstrates the influence of French literature on Lowell's work. As the French symbolist began developing the French *haiku* during the period of Japonism, Lowell's integration of this style makes sense. Unfortunately for Lowell, the polyphonic prose did not catch on with the other Imagists. However, Lowell's poems written from the transcriptions of early Chinese poets played a significant role in forming Lowell's East-Western Modernism. Unlike Ezra Pound, who translated Japanese poetry and Chinese poetry, Lowell did not know Chinese. Lowell states as much in the preface to *Fir-Flower Tablets*, where she sets her foundation for the text: "My duty in Mrs. Ayscough's and my joint collaboration has been to turn her literal translations into poems as near to the spirit of the originals as it was in my power to do" (par. 1). The "spirit of the originals" is key to understanding Lowell's association with East-Western fusion of Modern life as Lowell's understanding of China would be skewed by her limitations as an outsider. Huang states in his essay that "Lowell had to depend on

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<sup>15</sup> From the French symbolist poet Paul Fort she learned a technique of writing "polyphonic prose" – prose which used the different voices of poetry, such as "metre, vers libre, assonance, alliteration, rhyme and return" (Rumens).

Ayscough (who depended on her Chinese teacher) as a travel guide who could take her through the textual landscape. Ayscough, who, as exemplified in *A Chinese Mirror*, had mastered the Chinese genre of literary tourism, turned out to be a very capable guide” (98). While Ayscough provided Lowell with translations, Lowell’s understanding of the “spirit of originals” would come from the tourist vision of Ayscough and Japonist influence.

Huang points out differences in Lowell’s translation of Tao Yuan-Ming (Pound’s “To-Em-Mei”), entitled “Once More Fields and Gardens” from the original. Haunte argues that Lowell’s choice to transcribe Ayscough’s translation of a 5-character poem into *vers-libre* demonstrates the long journey of a tourist to reach the place where one finds himself (99). This *cadence verse*<sup>16</sup>, as Lowell calls it, harkens back to French poets and can be seen in American Transcendentalist poets and later Walt Whitman. Lowell uses the form to capture her understanding of China and create spontaneity in the English poem, one that uses the “direct treatment of the thing” (Gioia 88) yet parallels it with the subjective resolution found in translation of Japanese poems by Pound. Both Lowell and Pound take from Japonism a vision of the Orient through a mix of writing and art that relied on the landscape and nature to create an art of the East. In Huang’s analysis, the critic observes that Lowell’s scenic descriptions are taken from the translations of character by Ayscough when Lowell writes, “the whirled water / of meeting streams” (9-10) and juxtaposed them with a subjective idea through the phrase “And calm with the leisure of moonlight through an open door” (14). While this usage of imagery and language would mimic some of the sentiments of *hokku* demonstrated by Pound and Japanese poet Yone Noguchi, Lowell’s translations do not adhere closely to aesthetics found in *hokku*.

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<sup>16</sup> Free-verse

In writing the poems for *Fir-Flower Tablets*, Lowell touches on an important aspect of Eastern art, the connection to nature and the observation of the poet. As a Tao poet, Yuan-Ming often relies on the poetry of nature much like the Japanese *hokku* poets. In his article “Tao Yuanming’s Natural Philosophy,” critic Shuyuan Lu explores the interconnectivity of Daoism and other Eastern systems of thought (34), illustrating the natural philosophy<sup>17</sup> of beliefs. Much of what Lowell captures through her attempt at honoring the original poems comes through interaction with and understanding of aesthetics in terms of treating the *image* in simplicity and authenticity. The same year that Lowell would published *Fir-Flower Tablets* she would publish “Twenty-Four Hokku on a Modern Theme” in *Poetry*. It cannot be coincidence that Lowell would use the word *hokku*<sup>18</sup> without having explored the works of the Japanese as well or at least studied the concept through her associates. Her exploration in these Eastern short-form poets would help her to explore ancient poetry, so she could create it anew. Through translation and critical view, Lowell would recognize the aesthetics that would appeal to the new Imagists<sup>19</sup>.

In the introduction to Lowell’s anthology *Some Imagist Poets* (1916), Lowell defines six rules that the new Imagists agreed upon as a necessary aesthetic for the poetry of the new. The following rules were not dogma for what Imagism should be, but rather what aesthetics were observed in accordance to the poets’ works themselves. They read as follows:

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<sup>17</sup> Natural philosophy or naturalism is a philosophy that the cosmos, society, and life are observed, explained, and experienced with Nature as the yardstick and from the viewpoint of Nature (Shuyuan Lu 34).

<sup>18</sup> Hakutani makes note that Noguchi and Pound were the only Imagists that used the term in place of *haiku*. This is both evidence of Lowell’s interaction with at least work on *hokku* and a lack of critical viewing of Lowell’s work.

<sup>19</sup> New Imagists will be used to distinguish the movement following Pound’s abandonment of the movement. As Pound viewed Amy-ism as a perversion of the foundations he laid down, it should be recognized that his work will be excluded from all new imagist works.

1. To use the language of common speech, but to employ always the exact word, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word.

2. To create new rhythms -as the expression of new moods -- and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon "free-verse" as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as for a principle of liberty. We believe that 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.

3. To allow absolute freedom in the choice of subject. It is not good art to write badly of aeroplanes and automobiles, nor is it necessarily bad art to write well about the past. We believe passionately in the artistic value of modern life, but we wish to point out that there is nothing so uninspiring nor so old-fashioned as an aeroplane of the year 1911.

4. To present an image (hence the name: "Imagist"). We are not a school of painters, but we believe that poetry should render particulars exactly and not deal in vague generalities, however magnificent and sonorous. It is for this reason that we oppose the cosmic poet, who seems to us to shirk the real difficulties of his art.

5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.

6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence of poetry.

(v-vi)

These rules can be observed in Lowell's own works, such as "The Pond" and "A Lover" where Lowell fuses the natural image of the scene with the direct language and experience of the speaker. They would set a foundation in Lowell's poetry that she would supplement with her thorough exploration of Eastern poetry. Lowell presents the *image* of the pond in a clear and free way, using *vers libre* to create a poem of conversation. Following her interest in structuring



demonstrate emotional reaction like punctuation of the English language (zo, ka, yo, etc.) while others act on verb conjugations to set a tense or tone (keri, ran, tsu, etc.). Lowell's "I could" acts as the Japanese もがな, a semantic particle that acts to showcase a hope or desire. This same cutting word can be seen in Noguchi's twelfth *hokku* from his *Japanese Hokkus* (1923) which reads

Leaves blown,  
Birds flown away.

I wonder in and out of the Hall of Autumn (1-3).

Like Lowell's poem, Noguchi draws on the *kireji* to cut into the image of leaves and birds. His phrase "I wonder" acts as がな which serves to cut into a moment with the utterance of curiousness and wonder of the poet. Although Lowell's poem appeared first, her usage of the form demonstrates her dedication to understanding the tradition; she takes those traditions to create intrigue through her own interpretations of nature and form which contribute to adherence of simple, direct language in other Modernist writers.

Lowell's polyphonic prose poem "Guns as Keys: And the Great Gate Swings" (1917) takes a different approach in that it seeks to capture the essence of battle through an alternating harsh masculine tempo – the American Western cadence – with a more elegant lyrical cadence for the East. It reads:

Due East, far West. Distant as the nest of the opposite winds. Removed as fire and water are, as the clouds and the routes of the hills, as the wills of youth and age. Let the key-guns be mounted, make a brave show of waging war, and pry off the lid of Pandora's box once more. (428)

The opening stanza demonstrates the necessity of words working to create both tone and sound while evoking the alteration of harsh western sounds when speaking of West and war, yet the lines of nature flow with a smooth relaxed sound. In “Amy Lowell, New American Poet” Andrienne Munich sets Lowell’s poem in the context of “Commodore Matthew Perry’s opening up to American trade” and states the altering of “poetic rhythm evokes the historic confrontation” (xxxiii). Through her wielding of Fort’s prose form, Lowell demonstrates a poetic structure where East and West fuse together. Through elongated sentence structure, Lowell illustrates a mindset of a historical character venturing into the unknown. She juxtaposes the East and West through images of fire and water, describing them as “opposite winds,” then evokes the sounds and rhythms of battle through short subordinated clauses and word choices that echo the sounds of war.

Lowell demonstrates a Modernity different from Pound who painted Lowell as the thief of the Imagist movement, yet Lowell’s interpretation of the *image* isn’t quite so different. While Pound focused on the vortex of the image and sought to create a high-art of Modern poetics, Lowell inspired and supported the new Imagists when the movement of Imagism would likely have faded away. Her interest in creating spontaneous American poetics drew strictly from what Pound would deride as Amy-ism, Lowell presents a Modernist of East-West integration to a much greater impact than Pound. While Pound adhered to the authenticity of his early poems inspired by the East, Lowell internalized the aesthetics of classical Chinese poets and explored both the form and subject matter of the East. Though her initial interest in Eastern art could have been deemed a fetishization of the Orient, Lowell’s poetry transcended imitation to created hybridization of East-Western art discourse that would inspire and influence the new Imagists and American poets on through the line.



## CHAPTER 4

### WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS AND THE TRASCNEDENCE OF THE IMAGE

Literary critics often trace the history of Western *haiku* to early Imagist poet Ezra Pound because his poem “Station at the Metro” demonstrates a prominent use of *haiku* aesthetics such as superposition, juxtaposition of images, sparseness of language, and observation of specific to an internalized subjective of *image* to shape a Modernity of his Imagist movement; however, William Carlos Williams, as postulated by critic Edward Zuk in his article “William Carlos Williams and Haiku,” has been a “key figure in the early history of haiku, one whose contributions matched or even surpassed those of his peers. Pound may have been the pioneer, but Williams was the Modernist poet who did the most for the haiku in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (50). Such a disregard for Williams’ work can be viewed, like Amy Lowell’s literary obstacles, as a reflection of the narrative written by Ezra Pound whose collegiality at the beginning of Williams’ career defined Williams’ placement as part of the Imagist movement. Like Amy Lowell’s poems, Williams’ works serve to draw on Pound’s poetics and further the expectations of American poetics through his use of the *image* and a colloquial voice.

Williams became acquainted with Pound during his program in medical school at the University of Pennsylvania in 1902 where critic High Witemeyer records that the two bonded over interests in “poetry, theater and acting, French and Spanish literature, fencing, tennis, and pretty girls” (5), including poet Hilda Doolittle (H.D). Williams’ involvement and influence on Modernism often position Williams as predominately Imagist, yet at least one collection of work appears before Pound’s solicitations of *Des Imagistes*, a privately published book *Poems* (1909). Williams sent off a copy to Ezra Pound, who in turn responded with harsh criticism, writing, “Individual, original it is not. Great art it is not . . . There are fine lines in it, but nowhere I think

do you add anything to the poets you have used as models . . . You are out of touch” (Gioia 143). With this criticism, Williams’ writing style shifts to better champion the ideals of Pound’s poetic revolution through “the simple order of natural speech,” and Williams never republished any of his collection. He would go on to publish in Imagist anthologies such as *Poetry*, *Others*, and the *Egoist* alongside poets such as Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, T.E. Hulme, H.D. and F.S. Flint who focused on the precision of language and the breaking of a meter replaced by conversational speech.

In his collection *Al Que Quiere!* (1917), Williams experiments with a variety of forms but establishes the parameters that would define the rest of his work. In his poem “Metric Figure” Williams follows in the Imagist creed to break the meter and focus on the *image* at hand. He writes:

There is a bird in the poplars!  
It is the sun!  
The leaves are little yellow fish  
swimming in the river.  
The bird skims above them,  
day is on his wings.  
Phœbus!  
It is he that is making  
the great gleam among the poplars!  
It is his singing  
outshines the noise  
of leaves clashing in the wind (17)

Unlike the early poems of Ezra Pound, Williams' poem shows no influence from the *hokku* in terms of structure or position, yet the use of juxtaposition of imagery can be seen. Much like in Pound's "Station at the Metro," "Metric Figure" creates a juxtaposition between the bird as the sun and the leaves as the fish in a similar fashion that would be found in Japanese *hokku* by Noguchi or Basho. While the contrast does not demonstrate a juxtaposition of urban and nature, Williams captures the seasonal *image* and transforms it from vortex to the subjective moment experienced when the singing penetrates the leaves in the wind. While Williams' incorporation of the *hokku* elements seems unintentional, his poem demonstrates the integration of Eastern poetic aesthetics filtered through Pound's influence on Williams' style.

As with many of the Imagists, Williams' interest in painting played an important role in shaping his poetic techniques and aesthetics. From a young age William's mother, an artist who trained as a painter in Paris, raised Williams to enjoy the medium so extensively that he took up painting for himself for a time. Williams says, "because my interest in painting, the Imagists appealed to me. I was an image that I was seeking, and when Pound came along with his drive for the image it appealed to me very strongly" (Gioia 144). Williams would engage with the work of painters like Cezanne, Matisse, Duchamp, and take formal elements from the Cubists to force the readers of his poetry to observe both the form of the work as well as their own perceptions in relation to the work. Works produced by these painters often drew on the influence of Japanese silk paintings and woodblock carvings as a result of Japonism in France. The lack of perspective and shadows of these works can be seen in the Cubist painters; the lack of perspective can frequently be found in Williams' poems such as the "Metric Figure" and long after his later definitive Imagist poem "The Red Wheel Barrow." Williams' influence of French

painters was well known among his colleagues like Wallace Stevens whose letter, critical of Williams' collection *Al Que Quiere*, read:

Given a fixed point of view, realistic, imagistic or what you will, everything adjusts itself to that point of view; and the process of adjustment is a world in flux, as it should be for a poet. But to fidget with points of view leads always to new beginnings and incessant new beginnings lead to sterility . . . One has to keep looking for poetry as Renoir looked for colors in old walls, wood-work and so on." (Stevens)

Stevens' comment echoes the criticism Williams would receive from many of his Imagist colleagues, for often Williams interjects the *image* with the interpretation. What many Imagists failed to recognize though was Williams' inventiveness and attempt not only to intimate the past but to "twist the knife" (Paz 4), then to weave it into his Modernity. The mention of Renoir, another French painter who painted orientalist themes demonstrates both Stevens' and Williams' awareness of Japonist influence given Stevens' inclusion and mention of old walls and "wood-work." Williams would demonstrate this influence in later poems, using precise language and lack of perspective in *hokku*-like structures.

In one of his most *hokku*-like, painting influenced poems "The Red Wheelbarrow" (1923), Williams draws on the vortex of the *image*, writing a short super-positioned poem that uses the lack of perspective to capture what Aitken would call a way of life. Williams had "[come] to the haiku between 1916 and 1921, when he wrote half a dozen early examples" (Zuk 50) by the time he wrote the "Red Wheelbarrow." Critics have defined Williams' personal Modernism through minimalistic style and his championing of Pound's "no ideas but things"<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "No ideas but in things" comes from Williams' 5-volume epic poem "Paterson" (1946-1958) which demonstrates a necessity of the *image* as the meaning from which ideas can be explored. This echoes the sentiments of the Imagists as well as the painters who influenced Williams, yet

(Gioia 144), where Imagist aesthetics forgo the injection of the writer into the scene. Williams' poem though, suggests a subjective interjection in the image which more closely resembles the Zen aesthetic of *hokku*. He writes:

So much depends

Upon

A red wheel

barrow

Glazed with rain

Water

Beside the white

Chickens

His imagery highlights many aspects of Zen poetics such as the image of rain which may incite a seasonal expectation for summertime, but like Pound's metro poem, Williams' poem contrasts the organic natural imagery with the inorganic image of the wheelbarrow acting upon the land.

The images are super-posed upon one another, reminiscent of the *hokku* written by Eastern short-form poets, Noguchi, and Pound. The vortex that Imagists sought to achieve manifests through Williams' understanding of painting in that he writes the *image* and only interjects the subjective stance through anticipation of the reader's reception to the poem. The

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Williams' aesthetic differs for Pound would argue that the idea should not be present in the poetry at all.

poem also makes use of the *kireji* – or cutting word – *ran*, further demonstrating Williams’ adaption and understanding of the form that Pound tried to commercialize for American consumption. His cutting word precisely acts as a semantic marker through the clause “So much depends / Upon” for Williams invokes the present tense “speculation of something that is happening which the [poet] is not directly involved in doing (Japanese-English Dictionary, Marriam-Webster 2010). Unlike other Imagist writers like Pound or Lowell, Williams’ innovation of an East-Western exploration cuts the poem open at the beginning, contrary to the traditional style of *hokku* where the image is presented then cut into. The lack of perspective again demonstrates an Eastern aesthetic which relies on the interpretation of the reader to recognize the necessity of the wheelbarrow as part of the way of life presented in the *image*. The distortion of time showcases the Modernist liminality where the Image becomes the subject and creates the vortex of the Imagist poem.

The idea of interpretation and the interruption of the image of the self would become reason enough for Williams to clash with Imagists, particularly with Pound who sought to restrict what the *image* would do. Much like the feud between Amy Lowell and Pound, Williams and Pound disagreed aesthetically, leading to criticism of Williams’ experimentation with the *image*. In the prologue of Williams’ *Al Que Quiere*, Williams writes:

E. P. is the best enemy United States verse has. He is interested, passionately interested—even if he doesn’t know what he is talking about. But of course he does know what he is talking about. He does not, however, know everything, not by more than half. The accordances of which Americans have the parts and the colors but not the completions before them pass beyond the attempts of his thought. It is a middle aging blight of the Imagination.

I praise those who have the wit and courage, and the conventionality, to go direct toward their vision of perfection in an objective world where the sign-posts are clearly marked, viz., to London. But confine them in hell for their parietic assumption that there is no alternative but their own groove. (Williams 29)

Here, Williams' criticism of Pound is one of the few instances where Williams' voice and opinions can be recorded because most of Williams' letters have been lost or were not saved by Pound (Witemeyer viii); thus, literary opinion favors Pound's capitalization on the movement. Pound's disregard for a place for the mind in Imagist poetry illustrates his imitation of the Zen *hokku* rather than integration of Eastern aesthetics. Williams' experimentation, however, demonstrates a point of the *hokku* form which Pound and his colleagues had neglected to recognize, the interrelationships of the *image* and the mind. In his book *Landscapes and Portraits*, critic and translator Donald Keene cites Basho's interest in history and literature as a driving motivation to write and travel. I agree with Zen teacher Robert Aitken who writes "the heart of Basho's *haiku*<sup>21</sup> is the very foundation of human perception of things – mind itself (xviii). Through the integration of readers' perception and the vortex of the image on the page, Williams taps into the aesthetic of Zen poetry where Pound failed.

In Zhaoming Qian's *Orientalism and Modernism: The Legacy of China in Pound and Williams* and *East-West Exchange and Late Modernism: Williams, Moore, Pound*, Qian historicizes Williams' exploration of Chinese poetry through his understandings of Pound's *Cathay* and Herbert Giles's *History of Chinese Literature*, yet he fails to account for Williams'

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<sup>21</sup> Like many critics of Western culture, Aitken uses the term *haiku* and applies it to all short-form Eastern poems that interpret the aesthetics of the *hokku*. Recognizing this standard of colonization in a form derived from the East is important in giving credit to Eastern artists for the impact of their art on shaping American poetics.

own developments in the *hokku*. Resulting from Williams' interest in brevity and precise language, Qian postulates that Williams took interest in Asian short-forms, drawing on both their natural affinities and the formal elements – this includes the arrangement of lines into short block stanzas which Qian attributes to the Tang Dynasty poets (125). Qian's analysis neglects to explore the impact of French artists on either Pound's or Williams' works; therefore, Qian glosses over much of the underlining experimentations in Williams' poems and ascribes it up to Pound's dominating narrative influence.

By comparison to William's "The Red Wheelbarrow," his earlier poem "Marriage" (1906), published in *Poetry*, more closely resembles Pound's metro poem in both form and imitation though his super-position seems much freer. Williams' word choice and tonality merge the *image* with the subjective mind of both the poet and the reader. Its shift from *image* to a poetry of the mind went unnoticed at its publication but would certainly have opposed Pound's concepts of his Imagism. Williams writes:

So different, this man  
and this woman:  
A stream flowing  
In a field

While "Marriage" has been super-posed into four lines, the similarity to punctuation and sentence structure is too similar to Pound's "In a Station at the Metro." The language of the poem is sparse and juxtaposes the man and woman with the stream much like Pound juxtaposes the crowd faces with petals. Williams' use of the colon after woman cuts the images without the use of simile, mimicking Pound's interpretation of the *hokku* structure. Unlike the metro poem,



the poem is made up of seventeen syllables, close to the structure of Noguchi's 5 / 4 / 4 / 3 syllable structure. Compare Williams' poem to Pound's in the following rearrangement.

So different, this man and this woman:	the apparition of these faces in the crowd:
A stream flowing in a field.	Petals, on a wet, black bough.

Williams' choice to build the four images on one another illustrates an imitation of Pound's structure, yet it distinguishes him from Pound through his interest in confining the poem to a form. Incorporating his interest in Cubist painters, Williams' construction carefully positions line breaks to leave the reader lingering on the image momentarily before moving to the next. By evaluating the individualism of Modernity in both Pound and Williams, future critics can look beyond the Western understanding of Eastern influences in Williams's work.

Williams has made the most use of *haiku* structure and form, little attention has been given to the impact of aesthetics derived from, or carried forth through, Asian short-form poetics. Zuk writes of Williams in his article "William Carlos Williams and Haiku":

Haiku helped shape his imagery, stanzas, and language as they evolved. In turn Williams would go on to shape the haiku's future: he had great influence on young Allen Ginsberg and, through him, an impact on Beat poets who included Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder, and through them the whole later history of haiku in the West. (Zuk 50)

While Williams abandoned the *haiku* model in 1921, the form and influences of imagery and precision continued to shape his work. His poem "Lily" (1928) links together a series of three-line stanzas which demonstrate a much deeper level of understanding of *hokku* with a specificity of language like "tiger-lilies" (2) and "spotted petals" (7). The poem showcases Williams' inclusion of the speaker's mind: First, describing the lilies, then moving to the hummingbird which seems to interrupt the speaker's train of thought. Williams super-poses these images,

juxtaposing interesting subjects which create the living vortex of the scene, then retreats into the subjective interpretation of the mind. Williams' poem fuses together the *hokku* aesthetic with the American lyric bringing together ancient Eastern styles with past English lyrical forms.

In his long poem "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower" (1955), Williams relies on a more stripped back form of poetry, including lines much closer to the one-line *hokku* of Modernist Japanese artists. The stanzas act in the same manner as a stanza of *tanka* poems which link together imagistic *hokku* and function as a piece of the whole scene. According to poet and critic Dr. Marilyn Kallet, the lines are precise and written "against the tradition of British prosody" in an attempt to "listen for the new, for the American idiom" (34). Like Lowell, Williams seeks to establish an American diction through fusions of language. Where Lowell fused cadence verse with the Polyphonic prose of the French, Williams creates a fusion of natural language and metered verse. He writes,

A sweetest odor!  
Honeysuckle! And now  
there comes the buzzing of a bee!  
and a whole flood  
of sister memories! (58-62)

By fusing meter with language, Williams' creation, the triadic lines<sup>22</sup>, carries the poem in a formal yet authentically American way. The structure acts to break the meter but maintains the poetics of traditional formalities. Through this creation, Williams makes poetry new and

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<sup>22</sup> As described in Edward Hirsch in *A Poet's Glossary*, triadic lines are long lines which "unfolds into three descending and indented parts."

surprising – both formally and audibly – presenting a Modernity that bridges past and present. Drawing on images of nature, Williams calls back the ancient, the Zen aesthetics, and juxtaposes “the buzzing of a bee” with “of sister memories,” creating a comparison of nature and mind. His exclamation points cut through the images and super-position them as a painter would overlay details on the canvas. While Williams deviates from direct treatment of the object on an Imagist level, he explores Asphodel through the sensations of the mind yet still captures the vortex of its being. His end-stop lines layer details of varying senses: the odor, the visual of honeysuckle, the buzzing, and experience of memories flooding in.

Although Williams never published Eastern translations while he was alive, translator David Rafael Wang credits Williams as a collaborator in his collection *The Cassia Tree* (1966) which presented American writers with translations of Chinese. Williams, like Lowell, collaborated with Wang to create English representations of the direct translations Wang provided. This work would cement Williams’ interest in East-Western fusion art as Williams’ English poems would act in a similar fashion to Lowell’s *Fir-Flower Tablets* which required full engagement of Western mind and the Eastern aesthetic. Wang writes in the preface of Williams,

These poems are not translations in the sense that Arthur Waley’s version are translations. They are rather creations in the American idiom – a principle to which William Carlos Williams dedicated his poetic career (34).

Unfortunately, many critics have ignored these translations completely as Williams’ poems seem to imitate the meaning of the early Chinese poets rather than provide an American-idiomatic representation of Chinese poetry. Rather, this project seems to have provided Williams with a better understanding of the difficulties of cross-cultural meaning and given him the tools to create his own Modernity through a fusion of East-Western aesthetics. As demonstrated in

“Asphodel, The Greeny Flower,” poems near the end of Williams’ life explored the culmination of his poetic career, integrating Eastern aesthetics into his poetry that would go on to create a stream of an international American Modernism.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMAGISM AND THE EAST-WESTERN FRAME OF MODERNITY

Critics often point to the Imagist movement as the most influential of Modernist movements, citing their publications and propaganda as having a diverse effect on readers and writers. Manifestos like Ezra Pound's "Imagism" and "Vorticism" drew writers like Amy Lowell from America to Paris for an international exploration of cross-cultural exchange. Gioia writes of Modernism at the time "Of all the artistic revolutions in history, Modernism was the first that involved – for many, but not all artists – a breakdown in the reliance upon traditional forms (84). For the Imagists, meter and the English-language traditional forms lacked restraint and filled poetics with contemplative, overly expressed verse like that of the Romantics. This led to the use of *verse libre* and focus on expression of the image or moment void of the artist's intent. Artists began turning to the past to construct new forms, they found in international exploration a means to draw Eastern arts and transform them into East-West fusion brought together through a growing international diversity. While some critics like Daniel Tiffany assess the political nature of the Imagist movement as "an exotic means of formalizing and dignifying suicide," stating that "the haiku form merits European (or Anglo-American) poetry to take its life publicly" (49), the form destroys the insistence of nineteenth-century nationalism and Western superiority found among the Romantics and interjects an East-Western discourse. Tiffany's position stands that the deconstructing of form in favor of precision and the omission of meditative Romantics is the public suicide of English-speaking traditions; However, the Imagists' experimentations with non-English-speaking language forms, especially the *hokku*, instead frame the birth of a poetics of Modernization decentralized by interest in international art.

Pound's influence as aesthetic critic and propagating artist for the *image* made for a movement of an international landscape of poetics which would result in a truly authentic American voice, one which embraced an East-Western discourse – though each Imagist poet would explore individual Modernisms. Through his propaganda in *Poetry* magazine and the imagist anthologies with Flint, Arlington, and others, Pound's influence would inspire artists like H.D., Amy Lowell, Wallace Stevens, W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, and William Carlos Williams, whose works all demonstrate a restraint of language and use of Pound's *image* as well. Poets like Gertrude Stein, who captured the moment of an image, construct *hokku*-like, parataxis structures in her poem "Red Roses" which reads "A cool red rose and a pink cut pink, a collapse and a solid hole, a little less hot" (1), while others draw from the parallel of Wallace Stevens' take more of the Zen philosophy explored by Pound's short-form works. In Stein's poem she illustrates a focus on the *image* and the process of planting. Like Pound's works of juxtaposition, Stein juxtaposes the ideas of hot and cold through the fading of red into pink with the collapse into "a solid hole." While not an Imagist poet in the sense of the Imagist creed, Steven in "The Snow Man," explores the subjective contemplations of the *image* much like Pound's "At a Station in the Metro" and distorts perception. In his "The Snow Man" traces of Chinese landscape paintings can be found in Steven's lack of perspective; his use of the opening like "One must have a mind of winter" (1), Stevens, like William Carlos Williams, uses the lack of perspective to remove the physical self from the poem and replaces it with the subjective mind describing the seasonal landscape. This again can be seen in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Bird," which explores perspective with short, contrived stanzas focus on varying *images*.

Pound's influence on Amy Lowell would deepen her interest in Eastern culture and arts, which would result in her exploration of Chinese short-form poetry. The aesthetics of Imagism,

particularly the precision of language and the focus on the subjective, paralleled many of the aesthetics Lowell found in her early love of Eastern art forms such as silk paintings. These connections can be seen in poems such “A Painter on Silk,” which capture the experience of the artist in a moment of creative subjectivity, and in her book title *Pictures of the Floating World* which draws directly from the Japanese term *ukiyo*, an expression of the Edo period which embraced what constituted everyday life and highlighted the artistic notion of its time, including painting, drawing, and print.<sup>23</sup> Lowell would maintain the interest in the *image* and promote the continuation of the movement with the *new Imagists* after Pound had abandoned it. Lowell’s use of cadence verse and the interweaving of Ford’s polyphonic prose would establish a shift from Pound’s imitation to an authentic fusion of East-Western art. She would influence many of the Imagists like John Gould Fletcher and later Modernist E.E. Cummings, who both drew from Lowell experimentation of the *image*. While critic William Drake states that “Amy Lowell’s liberating influence on other women poets is not easily measured. Some poets, not surprisingly, felt embarrassed and apologetic at the effrontery of a woman who would clash with men and smoke cigars in public” (77), Lowell’s influence on writers seems minimal due to both a disinterest in Eastern aesthetics and Pound’s overwhelming narrative positioning Lowell as a thief of Imagism. Without Lowell’s persistence and interest in continuing to promote the *image* and explore an East-Western fusion, many great works of literature would not exist.

William Carlos Williams, not unlike Pound or Lowell, preserves many Eastern aesthetics in his own Modernism yet finds an aesthetic fusion which brings together the ancient East and English traditions of the past with the *image* of the Imagist movement. His development in

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<sup>23</sup> The linguistic meaning behind *ukiyo* can be explored more through deconstructing the characters of the word which comes to an approximation of floating age of art. More can be found in S. Kite’s “Reconsidering Ukiyo-e.”

constructing his short form structures and his constant use of linked-verse echoes much of the early Eastern short-forms but with his own modernization infused. As Zuk states, Williams has done the most for the *haiku*, but Williams has also done the most for an East-Western discourse of arts and poetics. Williams' interest in experimentation and poetic outlook would influence the Beat Generation – especially poets like Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Gary Snyder – who all followed suit in exploring Eastern religions and portraying the experience of the moment for human condition. Gary Snyder, especially, explores the *image* of the images and the Zen experience of the moment through poems like “Why Log Truck Drivers Rise Earlier Than the Students Zen” to capture the subjective experiences. Having become a student of Zen, Snyder works to mind his own poetics through his experience as an American poet and a student of Eastern philosophy. Williams would also influence the San Francisco poets as well as poets such as Denise Levertov, Jack Spicer, and M.S. Merwin, who were among the few non-Japanese-speaking poets invited to present at the annual conference held by *Poetry Kanto*.<sup>24</sup> a bilingual journal which features Japanese poetry translated to English and related English-composed poetry.

While many critics may argue that the experimentation with Eastern forms by Imagists like Pound and Lowell would constitute cultural appropriation, the power dynamics and the commercialization of Modernism must be considered. In Edward Said's *Orientalism*, the Orient is described somewhat as a mis-seeing of the other, drawing stereotypes as a means of defining a people; However, as pointed out by Rupert Arrowsmith, the Japanese anticipated a synthesis of Eastern and Western art, creating their own art fusions across many mediums. As Japan was

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<sup>24</sup> *Poetry Kanto* is a bilingual poetry journal which features contemporary Japanese poetry translated into English and contemporary English poetry. Most poems have some ties to cross-cultural experience.



never colonized by the West, and the Japanese embraced Western aesthetics for commercialization, the Imagists' experimentations parallel many of the themes and styles of Modernist Japanese artists. The Imagists do not represent stereotypes of the East but illustrate a deeper understanding of the correspondences of two Modernizing worlds.

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