Generally considered the poet most responsible for defining as well as promoting a modernist aesthetic in poetry in the early teens of the twentieth century, he opened a seminal exchange of work and ideas between British and American writers. He contributed to important literary movements such as Imagism and Vorticism.
SECTION SUMMARY

1. E. Pound’s LIFE & WORKS.
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3. «In a Station of the Metro»
4. «Alba»
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6. CONCLUSIONS & LEGACY.
1. E. Pound’s
LIFE & WORKS.
EZRA POUND

- **1885**: he was born at Hailey in Idaho in a Puritan family from New England.

- **1898**: he travelled around Europe for the first time in his life with his family and he came back enthusiastic.

- **1905**: he earned a Bachelor of Arts and Letters at the University of Pennsylvania (Hamilton College).

- **1906**: he won a scholarship and went back to Europe.
EZRA POUND

• **1908**: when he returned to America he taught Spanish and French literature at the University of Indiana but after four months he was invited to resign due to his eccentric life-style.

  He left for Europe with 80 dollars in his pockets convinced that what a writer needed was only what fit into two suitcases.

In London he soon became the centre of the literary life of the city.
1910: back in America for a short time he contributed to making the literary magazine *Poetry* one of the most influential in modern poetry. Some of the most significant programmatic articles of Imagist poets were published on it.


He helped and supported in every possible way all the artists and musicians he met.
1913: he was entrusted with the manuscripts of the well-known philologist Ernest Fenellosa by his widow. It would work as an incentive to the study of Chinese and lead to the transposition of several lyrics of that far-off country.

1914: he became secretary to the Irish poet W.B. Yeats, and imposed the publication of T.S. Eliot’s first poems. To him, “il miglior fabbro”, Eliot would dedicate “The Waste Land” for his advice, his criticism and his corrections.

He started working on his legendary Cantos (or The Pisan Cantos)
1925: he moved to Rapallo where he stayed till 1945. He had a daughter outside wedlock and a another from his his wife in 1926. He dedicated himself to his Cantos and to the translation of ancient Chinese poetry.

He entered politics and to his friends’ dismay he expressed

- scorn for the western democracies,
- fear towards communist Russia,
- admiration for Fascism under Mussolini’s «enlightened leadership»,
- support for Adolf Hitler and ferocious antisemitism.
EZRA POUND

- **1941**: the Italian government paid him to make hundreds of radio broadcasts criticizing the US.

- **1945**: he was arrested by the American forces in Italy and spent countless months in a detention camp.

While there he was forced to spend 25 days in a 6 x 6 foot outdoor steel cage, under the scorching sun during the daytime and floodlights at nighttime. This caused him to have a mental breakdown.
1946: returned to the United States to face trial for treason, he was pronounced “insane and mentally unfit for trial” by a panel of doctors and spent 12 years in St. Elizabeth’s Hospital for the criminally insane in Washington, D.C.

During his confinement he continued to write *The Cantos*, translated Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*, received visitors regularly, and also kept up a voluminous and worldwide correspondence.
EZRA POUND

- **1949**: controversy surrounding him burst out anew when he was awarded the important Bollingen Prize for his *Pisan Cantos*.

- **1958**: after continuous appeals from writers, the charges against him were dropped.

Once he was released Pound returned to Italy dividing the year between Rapallo and Venice.

- **1972**: he died in Venice, a semi-recluse by choice.
2. IMAGISM:
a new poetic movement.
Imagism was a poetic movement born in England and America in the early twentieth century.

A successor to the French Symbolist movement, it was considered a reaction to the traditions of Romantic and Victorian poetry.

It was rooted in ideas first developed by English philosopher and poet T. E. Hulme who, as early as 1908, spoke of poetry based on an absolutely accurate presentation of its subject, with no excess verbiage.
Pound’s imagist movement began in earnest in 1912: his definition of the image was

“that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.”

His typically short, free verse poems had clear precursors in the concise, image-focused poems of ancient Greek lyricists and, above all, Japanese haiku poets whose works consisted of three short lines that do not rhyme.
LANGUAGE, VERSE & STYLE

- Poets made use of the **language of common speech**, employing the **exact word**, not the nearly-exact, nor the merely decorative word. Thus the language of their poems could be symbolic and allegorical, yet it also **had to be** succinct, clear, simple, essential, direct, economical.

- They embraced **free verse** focusing on the rhythm of their phrases, NOT on poetic meter.

- If concentration was the very essence of poetry for imagists, the **style** was necessarily **terse and spare**.
The THREE RULES

1. direct treatment of the “thing,” whether subjective or objective;
2. to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation;
3. regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome.
LUSTRA

Pound believed that

“It is better to present one Image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous works”

and he supported absolute freedom in the choice of subject.

Thus in 1916 he published a collection of perfectly worded free-verse poems in Lustra, which deal efficiently with a whole range of human activities and emotions.

The opening lines are emblematic:

“And the days are not full enough
And the nights are not full enough
And life slips by like a field mouse
Not shaking the grass.”
3. «In a Station of the Metro»
This is what Pound wrote on the genesis of the poem:

- **Three years ago in Paris I got out of a ‘metro' train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly a beautiful face, and then another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful beautiful woman...**

- **...and I tried all that day to find words for what this had meant to me, and I could not find any words that seemed to me worthy, or as lovely as that sudden emotion. And that evening... I was still trying, and I found, suddenly, the expression...**

- **...I do not mean that I found words, but there came an equation... not in speech, but in little splotches of colour. It was just that - a ‘pattern', or hardly a pattern... a word, the beginning, for me, of a language in colour...**
In a Station of the Metro

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.
Although the metropolitan location places the poem directly within modern life, the expression of the moment remains true to haiku principles and coalesces with the modern and the urban.

Traditional haiku have no titles, but here the title is essential: it fuses the synthetic, manmade, i.e. the dark urban station with nature, i.e. the displaced petals, in one double-image, a surreal juxtaposition, to show the disconnected realities of modern life.
ANALYSIS (2)

• The word *Station* written with a capital letter calls to mind the stations of the Cross of Christian tradition while the word *apparition* speaks of a sudden, miraculous manifestation, as if to say that the revelation is possible for everyone.

• With the demonstrative *these* the poet indicates that the experience he had is actually possible even now and for everyone: the *faces in the crowd* are comparable to *splotches of colours* while the petals communicate a sense of man’s transience, especially in a *dark* world in which nothing grows.
4. «Alba»
ALBA

As cool as the pale wet leaves
of lily-of-the-valley
She lay beside me in the dawn.
In this poem Pound captures and evokes the sensation experienced on awakening with a lover in a poem which contains numerous elements found in traditional haiku as, for example, the inclusion of the kigo, i.e. a seasonal word, lily-of-the-valley, which

- locates the poem within a specific time and place,
- provides a comparison with the lover, fusing the natural world with the woman in the speaker’s arms.

The poem is also an aubade, i.e. a song to the morning.
The word *Alba* literally means ‘sunrise’ but an alba is also a subgenre of the *aubade*: traditionally, such poems were written against the waking sun, in a bid by the lovers to maintain their bliss a while longer.

Everything speaks of regeneration and purification the leaves, made *cool* and *wet* by water, the symbol of renewal and cleansing *par excellence*, the *pale*ness of the leaves of the white *lily-of-the-valley*.

The last word of the poem, *dawn*, closes the circle begun by the title making the ephemeral moment of bliss permanent.
5. «The Garret»
The Garret

Come, let us pity those who are better off than we are. Come, my friend, and remember that the rich have butlers and no friends, And we have friends and no butlers. Come, let us pity the married and the unmarried.

Dawn enters with little feet like a gilded Pavlova And I am near my desire. Nor has life in it aught better Than this hour of clear coolness, the hour of waking together.
ANALYSIS (1)

- Pound sets the poem in the cheapest of accommodations, a garret, a room tucked underneath the roof of a house, the traditional haunt of an impoverished poet and suggests that he may be writing autobiographically.

- Pity seems to be the key word of the first stanza: reversing the ordinary pattern of expectations, at first the poet invites us to pity the rich upper class of England, explaining that they have butlers and no friends, but then he widens the range of those who should be pitied to the married and the unmarried, i.e. the whole world. Why?
Pound does not explain nor does he make clear the reason why he differentiates himself and his "friend" from the rest of the world: this introduces an element of suspense in the poem.

The second stanza starts with a simile: dawn is compared to the famous ballerina Pavlova. It is an image of delicacy, since the dawn has little feet, but also an image of wealth, as the Pavlova is gilded.

In the last four lines the mystery of the we is resolved: Pound is writing about himself and his lover so all those outside this loving union are to be pitied.
6. CONCLUSIONS & LEGACY.
CONCLUSIONS

Pound is a poet who aroused great controversy during his lifetime, at first because of:

- his baffling aesthetic views,
- his technical innovations,
- his use of unconventional poetic materials,

and later because of:

- his political views,
- his support for the Fascist government in Italy
- his deplorable antisemitism.
LEGACY

• For the greater part of the 20th century, however, he devoted his energies to advancing the art of poetry and, as T.S. Eliot declared, he

  “is more responsible for the 20th-century revolution in poetry than is any other individual”

• He contributed to making modern poetry possible in English by promoting, and also occasionally helping to shape, the work of such widely different poets and novelists as W.B. Yeats, J. Joyce, E. Hemingway, R. Frost and D.H. Lawrence.