

Visual Arts and Poetry

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Visual Arts and Poetry

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Abstract

This essay explores the lives and works of three modernist poets: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and E.E. Cummings. It correlates their literary work with the emergence of modernist art and with the ensuing literary movements and aesthetic theories. Ezra Pound's role in the creation of modernist poetry was crucial. It was based on an image, a complex instant of time that can be viewed as a painter's motif. The use of collage, fractioning, symbols and others are all features derived of painters. Painters and poets belonged to a larger group and movements like Impressionism, Dadaism and Surrealism applied both to poets and painters, reciprocally lending new powers to one another. As well as resembling one, poems tried to interpret existing works of art as it can be seen in the use of ekphrasis in the works of William Carlos Williams. This interpretation of works of art might be also seen as a homage to a tradition feat. Visual art and poetry merged in the works of E.E. Cummings where its composition in short lines, lack of capitalizing, use of free verse, the extended spacing of words and punctuation best showcase the novelties in the visual arts.

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Introduction

Inspired by my essay ‘*The Arts and Poetry – The case of E.E. Cummings*’ with its research and the collection of essays on the art of painting by 20th century poets ‘*Poets on Painters*’ edited by J.D. McClatchy, this work is centered around the visual arts and the literary, more precisely – the modernist poetry.

The topic of this work will be further explored in the work and lives of three poets: Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and E.E. Cummings. It will show how the visual arts reflected on their poetic creation and their lifestyles. Each of these three poets represents a faucet in the emergence of modernism.

Each poet had a different approach to writing and instilling various influences in their works. And just like painters of their times, they created with paint and lines on a canvas reshaping what and how it meant to write.

Modern poetry drew a lot from painters and as Ezra Pound saw it this new poetry was based on the image. This image could give one a sense of liberation and growth that one might experience in the presence of masterpieces. Some of the features of the modernist poetry are largely pictorial – its energy, the use of collage and cubist fractioning, the expressivity of free verse, using technique as content – all of these derive from painters.

To further explore this topic, I am confronted by a plethora of written material, ranging from articles on certain aspects of one’s poetic works to literary companions of certain poets and books dedicated to this duality or multidisciplinary of a poet-painter.

By synthesizing all of the information, comparing it, evaluating the important and less important, cutting it out and shaping it, I will present answers to my thesis with carefully crafted bits of information which all relate to each other but most importantly, to the thesis of my work.

Ezra Pound

Ezra Pound was a poet, translator, editor, anthologist, letter-writer and essayist born in Idaho on October 30th, 1885 to parents Homer and Isabel Pound. (Nadel, 1) From a young age he moved a lot, attending the Cheltenham Military Academy in 1897 after his primary formal education. Even before graduating he made his first trip to Europe in 1898 with his mother and his aunt. He began the University of Pennsylvania in 1901 with his studies gravitating to Romance languages (Spanish and Latin), later expanding his studies to Anglo-Saxon, Provençal, Hebrew and studies of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. This would mark the beginning of his idea of living in Europe and writing a grand and lengthy work, a modern epic. His closest friends were William Brooke Smith and Hilda Doolittle, who would remain a lifelong friend and a muse of sorts, dedicating his earliest volume to her in 1907 (it consisted of 25 poems for her). Afterwards he met William Carlos Williams with whom he had a steady correspondence throughout their lives. (Nadel, 3)

Wanting to leave America, he had to prove to his father he had talent, so he went to Witter Brynner, a poet and editor who was impressed by Pound and his work. His praise allowed Pound to leave and so he did on March 17th, 1908. In Venice he published his first book *A Lume Spento* (With Tapers Spent) but it was not reprinted despite Pound's fake reviews and it was only published in America by the 1865. The arrival of pianist Kitty Heyman would postpone his work but he continued to write, collecting it in his 'San Trovaso' notebook. (Nadel, 5) After publishing *Sestina: Altaforte* in which he reinvented the sestina, robbing it of its artificiality and decorous tone, Elkin Matthews, publisher of his early works introduced him to a wide literary circle. Through it, he met Ford Maddox Ford who had a critical role in the evolution of his style. (Nadel, 6) In 1909 he met William Butler Yeats whom he met daily, later spending three winters as his principal secretary, exchanging ideas. (Nadel, 10)

While in London Pound acted as a literary manager and overseer of different publications, obtaining and promoting works of new poets. He saw himself as someone who must keep alive a certain group of poets that would set the arts in their rightful place. In March of 1916 he reviewed books, acted as executor of his late friend's Gaudier-Brzeska estate, oversaw the packing of a Vorticist exhibition for New York, made selection of Yeats's father's letter for publication and produced a play by W.B. Yeats while trying to revive the magazine *The Egoist* – all of this showcases how seriously he took his job. (Nadel, 12) In January 1921 he moved to Paris, France, finding a new stimulating circle which consisted of Cocteau, Picabia, Picasso, Stein, Brâncuși, Hemingway, Nancy Cunard and Natalie Barney's salon. (Nadel, 13)

Pound's Writing on the Visual Arts

The collection *Ezra Pound and the Visual Arts* from 1980 has all of Pound's writing on art, a small part of his art journalism and criticism. Pound also partook in Vorticism (a movement solely concerned with the creative faculty, opposing the mimetic one) and referencing Italian Renaissance and modernist art in his work. (Dasenbrock, 224) He was a strong believer in a direct acquaintance with the experience in the creation of art which helped validate his authority but he admitted he wrote about art as an outsider, as someone who has not mastered the tools of the trade. As Dasenbrock put it, Pound enjoyed visual arts because of their social and public nature, not *for* themselves. The art's nature allowed them to be seen in public spaces and Pound was piqued by their publicity. (Dasenbrock, 226)

Pound also found great importance in a good patron - one who found in John Quinn, an American lawyer who organized the Vorticist exhibition in New York in 1917 and the first great American collector of modern art whose collection consisted of French art and a large number of Picasso's work. He was an ideal patron because the money he was giving was given to the artist themselves. (Dasenbrock, 228)

Pound's search for patronage was a Renaissance ideal that connected arts and one of the crucial reasons why Pound explored the visual arts. Public art demanded patronage that Pound admired in the Renaissance, especially Sigismondo Malatesta's patronage for Agostino di Duccio, Piero della Francesca and Leon Battista Alberti. (Dasenbrock, 229)

Pound had an interesting opinion of patronage considering the patron an equal to the artist because by supporting the creation of the art he also creates. When the patron buys from an already famous artist he ceases to create because he is a consumer, not a creator. (Dasenbrock, 230)

'Making It New' – Creation of Modernism

As one of the three most important figures in the development of the early twentieth-century phenomenon, modernism, Ezra Pound (with T.S. Eliot and T.E. Hulme), revolutionized Anglo-American poetry, re-introduced traditional poetic forms and themes in a way that could enhance the experience of the modern world. As pioneers in the use of free verse and the expansion of subject matter in poetry, Hulme and Eliot also provided support of Pound's Imagist movement – Hulme provided the intellectual impetus, and Eliot named it 'the starting point of modern poetry'. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Pound's *The Cantos* became the most innovative and influential poems of English language. Besides their poetic experimentation, their work included various theories on major issues of the times – they implicated matters of politics, tradition and language. They were fascinated with obscure literary traditions and contemporary philosophy, establishing an influential system of literary values through their writings and their position in literary circles. (Beasley, 1)

Modernism itself might be viewed as a product of intellectual crisis – it urged one to question, analyze, categorize and focus one's attention to all that cannot be scientifically proven.

(Beasley, 12) For Hulme, poetry is a direct language of images and it could connect experience and understanding. (Beasley, 13) Modernity is clearly viewed in Pound's maxim 'make it new' insisting on a reaction against something else, something 'not modern'. (Beasley, 19) Emphasis on originality in literature is compatible with knowledge of literary predecessors and displaying it – this influence had to be acknowledged or concealed. (Beasley, 20)

Writing and discussing pressing problems of their day in philosophy, fine art, economics, politics and education – a variety of interests allowed them to connect these fields with the literary, challenging the role of the poet or artist in the society – all three of these writers were specialists in the realm of culture. (Beasley, 2)

Influences on the Development of Modernist Poetry

The modernists Ezra Pound, T.E. Hulme and T.S. Eliot were influenced by aestheticism, a way of thinking rather than a movement about art and culture. Aestheticism emphasized the value of 'l'art pour l'art' i.e. art for art's sake, viewing art as something with no social responsibility, its object being the appreciation and cultivation of beauty. It was described by Frederic Jameson as a compensation for everything lost in the process of the development of capitalism, insisting on the importance of quality rather than quantity. (Beasley, 22)

French Symbolism exerted another crucial influence on the modernist, considering how Eliot believed that the kind of poetry they needed did not exist in English. The poetry he needed was first introduced in 1899 work by Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, which consisted of eight essays on French writers. Symons viewed Symbolism as a form of expression for an unseen reality. The manifesto of the Symbolist movement was published by a minor French poet, Jean Moréas in 1886 but some of the most important Symbolist writers had their works published by 1880. Some cite its origin as Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* from

1857. (Beasley, 27) The work Symbolists produced was riddled with musicality, obscurity, mystery, the use of free verse and symbols. One universal characteristic is the inability of language – if it cannot describe a feeling or a thought, a symbol might evoke it obliquely. (Beasley, 26) Evocation, allusion and suggestion were all used in the poetry of free verse. (Beasley, 27)

This imperfection of language and changes that needed to be implemented were deepened as the studies between different languages started, especially the ancient ones like the Sanskrit and Egyptian hieroglyphics. The materiality of a language – its system, a set of rules and patterns was different from the view of language as a natural means of expression. There came a new emphasis in linguistic thought with signs and symbols assigned as letters and words. (Beasley, 27)

The most influential part was the reinterpretation of Symbolists' use of the poetic symbol for the modernist poetry, viewing symbols as the 'image' or 'Image'. Correlating the ideogrammic method and the emphasis on the moment, human consciousness can be viewed as a series of discrete moments or a succession of moments interpreting each other that is carried forward in the future. Symbolists used the symbol to evoke a reality they believe language could not represent directly. (Beasley, 35)

Art was one of the most important influences on the movement, especially primitivism and abstraction. The linking of one culture to another was one of the hallmarks of modernism. Hulme in 1913 and 1914 championed this new, emerging art, especially the group of artists known as the 'Vorticists'. Cubism and Vorticism indicated the emergence of a general change in outlook towards the world. (Beasley, 71) Hulme was further influenced by art historian Wilhlem Worringer's proposition of viewing the history of art as consisting of two artistic intentions – naturalism, an expression of empathy, expressing the artist's delight in the world and abstraction, an expression of artist's anxiety about his place in the world. (Beasley, 72)

The work of Ernest Fenollosa, a distinguished Orientalist whose notebooks and manuscripts were given to Pound introduced him to the world of the Chinese ideogram which would influence Pound's aesthetic and poetic practice. (Nadel, 10) Pound edited Fenollosa's papers, one of which was an essay *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry* published in 1919 in *The Little Review* as a key modernist document of immense importance to modern poetry. Fenollosa argued that Chinese was a naturally poetic language because of the pictographic quality of its ideograms. Fenollosa's mistake of viewing Chinese as such proved to be extremely productive for Pound who saw the Imagist (and Symbolist) dream of poetry present in Chinese language. Especially important was how compound words in Chinese presented a relationship between things, not only things themselves. (Beasley, 74)

Modernist poetry

T.E. Hulme's *A Lecture on Modern Poetry* from 1908 is a very early statement of poetic principles associated with modernism with advocated writing in free verse, juxtaposing distinct images on separate lines to convey new emotions and an extension on his exploration of the complex relationship of realities. Hulme's theorizing on this new approach to poetry is one of the bases for the Imagist movement Pound founded in 1912. (Beasley, 3) Hulme emphasized the importance of the poetic image which could allow for the whole poem to consist of images in different lines, viewing poetry as a 'direct language' that creates images. (Beasley, 31)

Pound's *New Method in Scholarship* from 1913 inspired by a conversation with Hulme and the power of the visual image, resulted in the creation of his 'method of Luminous Detail' as he called it in 1911 (later renamed 'the ideogrammic method' from his belief that Chinese ideograms are pictures with meaning taken from his editing and publishing of Ernest Fenollosa work.) (Beasley, 6)

In 1917 Eliot and Pound felt it was time for a new counter-current, a reaction against free verse whose popularity Eliot and Pound viewed as being played out as a useful role in changing Anglo-American poetry. This reaction against the free verse was logical result of political and ethical associations. (Beasley, 57)

Pound's *Cantos* (written from 1915 to 1969), especially the first sixteen adopt the 'ideogrammatic method' he left after abandoning the Imagist movement. With the method he could juxtapose historical narratives and anecdotes, quotations and comments to include historical events. (Beasley, 7) As a trained philologist, a scientific take on a literary study, he knew how to study the literature of the past by researching the historical use of words (Beasley, 13)

His introduction of the 'method of Luminous Detail' and Hulme's poetry of isolated details both focused on an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. Eliot showcased his understanding of these notions when he showed Pound his poems later published as *Prufrock and Other Observations*. Pound, who was the one suggesting to William Carlos Williams to modernize his writing was amazed how Eliot did it on his own. His work was in free verse and emphasized the closely observed detail, expressing the values Hulme and Pound associated with modern verse. This all could be correlated with the shared literary source – French Symbolism. (Beasley, 14)

The tension between tradition and originality is also one of modernism's defining features. Defined by experimentation, being different from everything before, these men also explored older literary traditions, correlating with Pound's 'making it new' they recognized that something is not wholly new, acknowledging a former existence (Beasley, 63)

While theorizing about the literary tradition and its history and exploring specific sources Pound and Eliot, with their works *Cantos* and *The Waste Land* respectively, created 'difficult' mature

works. But describing these works as ‘difficult’ is misleading when we should be asking ourselves why we should be able to understand these works as soon as we read them. Pound and Eliot can be seen as good poets that are specialists – trained in an art, working within a discipline developed by others over many years, building their predecessors’ research, creating works that emphasize the facts that their work does not exist by itself but within a literary context. (Beasley, 64)

With close and mindful engagement with others’ writing, Pound and Eliot emphasize how a poet should have a ‘historical sense’ writing while being aware of his own contemporaries, his own country and the whole of European literature. This knowledge and its implication in writing is how one creates something new and worthwhile. (Beasley, 65)

Pound was Eliot’s prime example of a contemporary poet with a ‘historical sense’ seeing his work as being original and archaeological with an emphasis on the knowledge of a literary tradition. (Beasley, 66)

The Imagist Movement

In the early fall of 1912, in the tearoom of the British Museum Pound read H.D.’s poem *Hermes of the Ways*, writing ‘H.D. Imagist’ at the bottom of the poem – and the movement was born. He sent the poem to the magazine *Poetry* in Chicago. Imagism was born out of Pound’s study of the Provençal poets and Dante and their emphasis on the precise and detailed. T.E. Hulme’s writing and French Symbolists allowed Pound to implement abstraction into the Imagist poem. The 1914 anthology, *Des Imagistes* consisted of work by H.D. (Hilda Doolittle), William Carlos Williams, Ford Maddox Ford, James Joyce and Amy Lowell. (Nadel, 9) It became the most important influential collection of modern English and American poetry – consisting of thirty-seven poems from which eighteen were translations or imitations of classical models and at

least five were recognizable translations. In the United States it was launched in the magazine *Poetry* and in England in the magazine *The New Freewoman* (renamed *The Egoist*). (Firchow, 6)

The prose manifestos of the Imagist movement were *Imagisme* by F.S. Flint but ghost-written by Pound, emphasizing direct treatment, concise wording and flexible rhythm as key principles and *A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste* by Pound emphasizing 'Image' as a complex instant of time. (Bornstein, 30) The first manifesto *Imagisme* published in the March 1913 edition of the magazine *Poetry* declines the movement as a 'revolutionary school'. This is further accentuated in Pound's work *A Few Don'ts by an Imagist* where the rules of the movement are described as neither dogmatic nor revolutionary. Pound and the first Imagists were writing poetry they liked to write that was not in conformity with a fixed program. (Firchow, 5)

And even though the Imagist movement was part of the Anglo-British avant-garde it was started off as a marketing ploy for their poetry, it was successful, and they were published in *The New Freewoman* with four anthologies of their poetry appearing from 1914 to 1917. Their original ideas were summarized in three 'principles' (from *Poetry* edition, March 1913): "direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective, to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation, as regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome". Imagist poems emphasized economy and lack of ornamentation, written in free verse, unconstrained. (Beasley, 38)

A poetic image is not a visual description but rather an intellectual and emotional complex and it is clearly seen in Pound's *in a Station of the Metro* (1913). Depending on a central metaphor of faces like petals, bringing two images together this two-verse poem in an innovative typography allows for the poem to be broken into discrete visual elements. The poem is made of visual images and its effect happens after you read the poem itself. When recounting the poem's conception – a moment on the Paris metro, Pound found he could not find a verbal

equivalent for the moment, just imagine ‘little splotches of color’, creating the archetypal Imagist poem. (Beasley, 39)

This poem also gravely draws from haiku, which points to another influence on the Imagists – the Japanese and Chinese poetry. H.D. and Aldington’s work indicates knowledge of ancient Greek poetry. And even though their literary models may seem unoriginal, Pound emphasized the formidable erudition, hard work and self-training an Imagist poem demanded. (Beasley, 40)

In his work, his use of images and language to juxtapose different perspectives placed Pound together with Surrealists, Dadaists and even Constructivists. He experimented with his work while using history in his work creating something akin to a Cubist or early Dada collage with fragmented images and bits of narrative. He mastered past conventions and then focused on revitalizing language and the poetic forms, especially the long poem. His use of fragmentation reflected other modernist developments, especially in art. (Nadel, 37)

Pound’s work consisted of conscious craft, the ideogrammatic organizations of literary history and the comparative traditions of multiple languages. (Bornstein, 25)

Vorticism

One of the characteristics of the Imagist movement was individualism, a keynote in Pound’s Vorticist movement, co-founded with the painter Wyndham Lewis in 1914. (Beasley, 6)

Vorticism as Pound saw it, was ‘the use of, or the belief in the use of, THE PRIMARY PIGMENT, straight through all the arts. (Pound, 15) Furthermore, Vorticism was concerned with the creative faculty, opposed to the mimetic one and creation was harder than copying something. (Pound, 16) Pound published a series of articles promoting the Vorticists like Lewis, Epstein and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska in magazine *The New Age*. (Beasley, 6)

At this time, he met the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska and the widow of Ernest Fenollosa. Gaudier-Brzeska introduced Pound to the new aesthetic of direct, geometric art which reflected in Pound's work with its new form of an 'arrangement of masses in relation, ... energy cut into stone'. The death of the sculptor in 1915 came as a shock to Pound who published a memoir of the late artists. (Nadel, 10)

Pound was also further developing Vorticism with Wyndham Lewis in their magazine BLAST ("Review of the Great English Vortex") which was first published in June 1914 and second in July 1915. Its typographical design was as important as its content – Vorticism in its material form. Seen as Italian Futurism in an English bottle, some saw it only as a lesser version of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's program. (Nadel, 24)

In his essay published in September of the same year Vorticism was described as an expression of energized past embodied in a work of art. It was focused, primary energy visible in the works of Kandinsky or in the poetry of his beloved H.D. The principle of Vorticism was simple: a painting was an expression arranged by form and color just like music was arranged by sound. In the 1914 essay Pound clarified the differences between Imagism and Vorticism – Imagism did not use images as ornaments but was speech itself, oriented around 'the luminous detail'. Vorticism was an intensive art implementing primary forms that allow the creation of other forms. (Nadel, 11)

William Carlos Williams

William Carlos Williams was an American poet born on September 17th, 1883 in Rutherford, New Jersey to parents Williams George and Raquel Helene Rose Hoheb Williams. His mother, a Puerto Rican, studied painting in Paris while his father's work took him to Latin America. In their household Spanish, French and English were spoken which added to the multiculturalism of the family and allowed Williams to publish translations in Spanish and French. (Macgown, 2)

From 1889 to 1896 he attended local schools in Rutherford after which he went on a first trip to Europe where both he and his brother Edgar attended a year at Chateau de Lancy near Geneva, afterwards spending a few months in Paris. From 1899 to 1902 he attended Horace Mann School after which he studied medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia from 1902 till 1906. There he met poets Ezra Pound and Hilda Doolittle (H.D.) and the painter Charles Demuth, developing an interest in drama while imitating Keats in his poetic work. He interned at French Hospital (New York City) and Child's Hospital from 1906 till 1909 after which he self-published his first book *Poems* with a title page designed by his brother. From 1909 till 1910 he studied pediatrics in Leipzig, travelled to France, Italy, Spain and England and began his medical practice in 131 West Passaic Avenue in Rutherford. (Macgown, 2)

Overall, he published more than forty books while regularly being published in magazines *Poetry* and *The Egoist*. He was also well known outside the USA, his work being published in Paris where it was sold in Sylvia Beach's bookshop in the 1920s. (Macgown, 1)

The Avant-Garde and William Carlos Williams

Ezra Pound introduced Williams to the New Jersey artists' colony Grantwood where he met Man Ray and Alfred Kreyenborg. It was closely connected with the avant-garde literary and

visual arts world of New York and Chicago and was very close to Williams' place of living, Rutherford. He spent all his life living there and its closeness to New York City's galleries, performances and avant-garde salons were of immense influence on him. New York also had a very strong avant-garde scene which consisted of artists Marcel Duchamp and Alfred Stieglitz with poets Wallace Stevens and Marianne Moore. (Macgown, 3) Painters like Charles Demuth, Marsden Hartley, Charles Sheeler and Ban Shahn were his friends and his art collection consisted of Demuth and Hartley's work. He knew many of his contemporaries with whom he had many correspondences. (Macgown, 1)

Williams' formative years started in 1913 and continued with the Exhibition of the Independents in 1917 which introduced him to the New York avant-garde. He was extremely taken in by the spirit of irreverence and revolt from the Dadaists who challenged the current mindset – Williams was immensely inspired by Duchamp's *Fountain*, a ready-made sculpture. Their art focused on liberation and on a radical break with the past. (Halter, 37) And while he might have not understood the new movements and their theories he was inspired by their attitude of defiance and liberation and their turn to the contemporary world. (Macleod, 39)

He looked for a similar revolution in poetry that could open new spheres by introducing new subject matters. The world Williams was familiar with was not written about because it was deemed unsuitable. Turning to these neglected subject matters allowed Williams to contribute to the local assertion and appreciation as is seen in his poem *Pastoral*. (Macleod, 39) He took a traditional literary form and replaced its classic values with urban 'low' culture symbols of junk. He was further pushed into the exploration of implementing 'lowbrow' American elements into the 'highbrow' European literary tradition and was inspired by Duchamp's enthusiasm for all things American because they were *new* and his love toward New York as a 'complete work of art', and embodiment of the scientific spirit and the technological advancement of the twentieth century. (Macleod, 40)

Something Williams disagreed with Pound the most was whether the modernist movement should be fundamentally local (American) or cosmopolitan (European). Moving to London in 1908, Pound made his home in Europe, believing that the American cultural atmosphere could not foster further growth. But Williams drew from his own American experience and he emphasized how locality must be understood in international context and this is what he considered ‘making new’. (Macleod, 26)

His artistic circle included artists from Alfred Stieglitz’s gallery – Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, Charles Sheeler and Marcel Duchamp, Jean Crotti and Albert Gleizes from Walter Conrad Arensberg’s salon (whom Williams met through Demuth). He found his own community of contemporaries in the magazine *Others* which included Kreymborg, Maxwell Bodenheim, Man Ray, Mina Loy, Marianne Moore and Wallace Stevens. (Macleod, 28) Of importance was Arensberg’s apartment where many artists gathered and where Williams could enjoy his growing art collection. (Macleod, 30)

When Williams started the magazine *Contact* with Robert McAlmon in 1920 the first issue’s manifesto emphasized the contact of other countries with America. The publishing of the magazine did not last long but it was a high literary quality consisting of works by the magazine founders, Ezra Pound, H.D., Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, Mina Loy and others. And even though it was devoted to ‘the local’, many of these poets were living abroad. But being involved with these artists, Williams became a part of transnational modernism. After World War I, Williams was urged to come to Europe and so he did – going on a six-month trip where he would meet some of the most important people of the international avant-garde. He also fictionalized his trip in the novel *A Voyage to Paganry* in 1928. On his travels he met writers James Joyce, Ernest Hemingway, Ford Maddox Ford, Nancy Cunard, Djuna Barnes, publisher Sylvia Beach, art-collection Peggy Guggenheim, and sculptor Constantin Brâncuși. (Macleod, 32) He also met Louis Aragon and Philippe Soupault both poets associated with Dada and

Surrealism, translation Soupault's *Last Night of Paris* in 1929 and becoming involved with its emergence in America when Andre Breton, the founder of the movement was in exile in New York. (Macleod, 33)

The Poetic Work of William Carlos Williams

William Carlos Williams' working as a doctor gave him an access to lives that would remain undiscovered – he intertwined their ordinary lives in his work. Even though his earliest work was centered on theater, poetry gained his attention. Some of his earliest influences were the works of Whitman and Keats, especially *Philip and Oradie*, an unpublished epic. Ezra Pound, his lifelong friend, was the one responsible for the modernization of his poetry after the publication of his book *Poems* in 1910. (Macgown, 2)

Pound also helped his earlier work being published in London where *The Tempers*, Williams' development into modernist direction, was published. This work mirrored some of Pound's Pre-Imagist work like the poem *Hic Jacet*, a result of Williams careful observation and medical work. Williams explored the possibilities of Imagism while standing up for more of an American art which Imagism enabled, throwing out many conventions of the European tradition i.e. the English poetic tradition. Imagism's modernity and economic efficiency was a mirror to America. It was focused on the immediate moment and the pictorial focus that urged the reader to look carefully at his or her surroundings – the same features that became key features in his later writings. This set his work against the international modernism of Pound, H.D. and T.S. Eliot. When Pound abandoned Imagism, Williams' poetry remained largely pictorial, local and concerned with immediate experience. (Macgown, 3)

As the modernist center shifted to Europe once again, especially to Paris where Gertrude Stein welcomed all expatriates' return, Williams felt isolated. His writing found a wider readership

with his work being published by James Laughlin's *New Directions* in the 1930s. In that time Williams expanded on the techniques of Imagists in his prose/poetry collection *Spring and All* (1923), *The Descent of Winter* (1927) and *Della Primavera Trasportata al Morale* (1930) all of which emphasized the importance of the moment but put in a longer form – the 1927 work was written in a diary form and the 1930 was a ten-poem sequence. His interest in larger formats is evident in his drafts for his epic poem *Paterson* whose final version of four published volumes is composed like a collage of Williams own and others' writing. (Macgown, 4)

William Carlos Williams' Artistic Paragons

What *Paterson*, the work that finally brought him a wider readership and other works emphasize is the importance of locality for the writer. Williams was immensely invested in the local culture – being in a daily contact with his patients also enhances his use of multiple perspectives in writing. (White, 8) Local culture and conversations with his contemporaries was also essential to the expansion of his literary modernism and his own literary position. The ongoing dialogue he established with other artists stimulated Williams' own creativity. (Macleod, 24)

Pound and his Imagist movement which started in 1914 helped Williams to implement sharp observation, economical phrasing, organic rhythm and free verse into his own work. (Macleod, 25)

As already mentioned, Williams was enthralled by Duchamp's creation because they emphasized the artist's role. There was an appeal in moving a found object into an artist's studio or gallery, giving them a title and a signature and Williams exemplified this in his *objets trouvés* poetry like *The Red Wheelbarrow*, *The Great Figure*, *The Right of Way*, *Perfection* and *Between Walls*. (Macleod, 41)

Williams and his close contemporaries were the most influenced by the close collaboration between literature and the visual arts – Williams, Demuth and Marsden Hartley all made their contribution to the indigenous American art. (Macleod, 41) The expansion of the subject matter allowed Demuth to paint a series of ‘poster portraits’ as homages to his friends.

I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold (1928) is based on Williams’ poem *The Great Figure* written on his way to Marsden Hartley’s studio when he saw the flash of the figure 5 as a fire engine passed by him. The poem itself evokes the dynamic chaos of an urban cityscape closely evoking the elements of the Italian Futurist movement – the technological and urban. But Williams does not lose the individual – he is still present in the effect of anxiety this moment causes in poetic subject. Demuth’s painting emphasizes the subject matter Williams chose – the modern city as a purely modernistic choice. (Macleod, 43) In early 1920 Williams was a modernist poet, combining the Imagist attention on one or few images written in terse lines that enhance every detail of this image, a moment. Williams also used enjambment and rhythm as important tools to visually organize a poem. (Macleod, 44)

Visuality of William Carlos Williams’ Poetry

The visual dimension of a poem, how it ‘lied’ on the page was immensely important to the poet, becoming aware how arranging poems in little stanzas of two, three or four lines greatly improved their stability and order. Free verse was not his preferred writing technique as he saw all art as orderly and the stanzaic or patterned poems conformed better to the page. (Macleod, 44)

This imaginative shift in the imaginative transformation of the scene using layers or levels as in the poem *The Nightingales* transformed the whole subject matter of the poem. This was Williams’ own counterpart to the European heritage, his own (American) poetry. (Macleod, 46)

The 'secularization' of the subject matter made Williams draw parallels between his work and that of his favorite cubist painter, Juan Gris whom Williams' appreciated because he painted familiar, simple things he was familiar with and detached them from the ordinary. (Macleod, 46)

Williams also became aware of the literal aspects of words as black letters on white pages, seeing how they can be moved around the page to create a pattern or become art of a design – attempting to fuse poetry and painting, seeing how making a design in a poem and in a picture is the same thing. The typographical arrangement, the architectural design of a poem allows the details in a scene to be taken in almost cinematically (Macleod, 47)

He saw the possibilities of designing a poem – the arrangement of words, lines and stanzas as visual effects and developed different techniques to further develop his own writing – such as the stanzaic form as it can be seen in the poem *Canthara*. In the poem the movement is represented in the way the lines stand, the old man's urge is represented in the enjambment of the first lines and the whole visual dimension is emphasized. (Macleod, 48)

In Post-Impressionist and early Modernist art the importance of design in poetry and the visual arts was architecture and its bricklaying. Williams' own constructivist art theory was best defined in his view of a poem as 'a small (or large) machine made of words'. Theories of expression, like Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912) were also important to Modernist art. Kandinsky regarded the exploration of visual dynamic as something inherent to forms surrounding us. Good art should make us aware that all forms are visual action. (Macleod, 49)

Poems like *To a Solitary Disciple*, *Spring Strains*, *Portrait of the Author*, *Raindrops on a Briar* and *The Locust Tree in Flower* underlie this notion. *The Locust Tree in Flower* is a great example. Its intricate design draws the reader's attention that it was crafted – made, constructed.

The shape of the poems itself imitated a locust tree and it imitates the sequential act of the speaker's perception of details as the eye follows the parts. The 'randomness' of the string of words functions as a puzzle the reader must sort out – assigning the reader the role of a co-creator who must find out the meaning of the poems. This, just like an abstract work of art, opens the poem to multiple interpretations, directing the reader towards not only the meaning of the words but how they mean as well. (Macleod, 51)

Already mentioned work in four volumes, *Paterson* is a large-scale collage, which was introduced in art by Braque and Picasso at the beginning of the century. *Paterson* consists of the main text and snippets of different prose writing (from historical documents to contemporary material like letters) making its composition multiple and assembled. This conception of an artistic work as large-scale montage or construction is contrasted to the traditional notion of organic unity where the meaning of individual parts is only possible within the unity of the whole. After finishing the fourth volume he wrote Book V where he wrote about the importance of art. In the passages devoted to painting he emphasized the work of old masters (artists of unicorn tapestries, Albrecht Dürer, Hieronymus Bosch, Sandro Botticelli and Pieter Brueghel the Elder). The poem devoted to Brueghel's *Nativity* anticipates the cycle of poems published in *Pictures from Brueghel* in 1962. (Macleod, 51) Williams celebrated Brueghel and his work as an artist who also painted the 'whole' world, not making any distinction within it. Williams does not contrast Brueghel, his work and other old masters with modernists of his time but suggests a progression of art that goes even further back in history. His view on his own poetry as an art construction reflects the aesthetics of contemporary modernist painting and a view of art as a combination of passionate sincerity of vision with a compelling rigor of design. (Macleod, 52)

When Williams used ekphrasis to write about old masters he employed a genre of poetry that describes existent or imaginary works of art. (Verdonk, 231) Williams wrote most about Brueghel the Elder, dedicating ten poems which were part of his poetry collection *Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* from 1962 for which he was awarded the Pulitzer Prize of 1963, two months after his death. (Verdonk, 234) As a prominent aspect of twentieth-century poetry was its involvement with visual arts and the use of ekphrasis emphasizes this. The complex, changing and various relation of poet, work of art and the audience strengthens the relation of poetry and painting as a view of our inner and outer worlds and this is evident in the strong presence of paintings as well as the manifestos following new and emerging art styles at the beginning twentieth century (Loizeaux, 2)

Some of them, like Impressionism, Dadaism and Surrealism applied to both painting and the poems, sharing a goal. Imagism implied an analogy to visual arts by focusing on the instant moment, abstraction allowed poets to work by analogy to painting and many poets and artists collaborated with each other, some of them even producing imagetexts. Some of the authors implied references and allusions to visual arts (as in *The Cantos* by Ezra Pound), some were critics both of writing and other arts. (Loizeaux, 3)

When a man makes a poem, makes it, mind you, he takes words as he finds them interrelated about him and composes them – without distortion which would mar their exact significances – into an intense expression of his perceptions and ardors that they may constitute a revelation in the speech that he uses. It isn't what he says that counts as a work of art, it's what he makes, with such intensity of perception that it lives with an intrinsic movement of its own to verify its authenticity.

- William Carlos Williams, Introduction to *The Wedge* (1944)

E.E. Cummings

E.E. or Edward Estlin Cummings was an American poet, painter, essayist and playwright who was born in 1894 in Cambridge, Massachusetts and who died in 1962. In his lifetime, he wrote over 2,900 poems, two autobiographies, four plays and several essays, most of which are of the art critic variety. He was writing from a young age and that at a period from the age of eight to twenty-two he wrote daily, wanting to explore the poetic form. He graduated from Harvard University with a BA *magna cum laude* and received a MA in 1916. (Kidder, 255)

His work has been collected and published in many collections but his first published work, *The Enormous Room* (1922) is a fictionalized account of his French captivity in April 1917, during World War I in the Norton-Harjes Ambulance Service. His first collection of poems, *Tulips and Chimneys* was published in 1923, followed by *&* which consisted of all the deleted poems from the first one and *XLI* both of which were published in 1925. (Kidder, 255)

Transposing the Method of Art into Poetry

When talking about E.E. Cummings many critics paint him as an eclectic artist who through his paintings and drawings, according to Slater Brown “carried over the eye and method of art into the field of poetry”. He has also been seen as a painter of the Renaissance, in Paul Rosenfeld’s words, who has “come to give a verbal equivalent for the arabesque”. In his literary work he used typographical devices which are “visual in nature but nonvisual in function” according to Norman Friedman, while Gary Lane marked him as an Impressionist word-painter. (Kidder, 255)

The visual arts – especially the painting and sculpture of the first several decades of the 20th century and the newly found advances of Cubism and Futurism were the most fertile source of inspiration for his early works (first three volumes *Tulips and Chimneys* (1923), *XLI Poems*

(1925) and & (1925)). These developments brought novelty into the visual taste and the advancements of visual artists and changes in painting of Cezanne, Picasso, Braque and Matisse were made visible to Cummings at the Armory Show of 1913. (Kidder, 256)

Cummings was taken to the Armory Show by S. Foster Damon, a fellow writer, musician and editor of the Harvard Music Review who taught him to play the piano and subsequently introduced him to Debussy, Stravinsky and Satie, the paintings of El Greco, to Cezanne, the Impressionists and the Fauves. Damon and Scofield Thayer also acquainted him with the new trends in arts (Wilde, Beardsley, Symons, Toulouse-Lautrec, Picasso, Brâncuși, Post-Impressionists and Cubists) which gave him a sharp eye. (Kidder, 258)

Borrowings from the Visual Arts

With the novelties in the visual arts there also came novelties in the poetry of Cummings' contemporaries which can be seen in the composition in short lines, lack of capitalizing, use of free verse, the extended spacing of words and punctuation (as it can be seen in Ezra Pound's *In a Station of the Metro*). (Kidder, 256) French poet Apollinaire published his *Calligrammes*, curious typographical oddities in 1917 and Dada poets were creating visual art out of words at the same time when Cummings was working. (Kidder, 257)

While Cummings made poetry out of words while still borrowing from the visual arts, most of his contemporaries rarely violated the sanctity of lines and words. What Cummings did was breaking open words, scattering letters across the page, introducing punctuation where it has not been before. He insists that poetry is not only words and punctuation but a matrix of empty space in which they hang. This all showcases how deeply he investigated the interrelations between arts and how through his study he incorporated his findings into his work. (Kidder, 257)

This sense of interrelationship and integration of the aesthetics of the two emerged early in his life and work, all of which can be seen in a large production of pages of prose, poetry and sketches all the way from his Harvard days and the influence of his friends like John Dos Passos, James Sibley Watson and Arthur Wilson, all of which shaped his taste in the visual arts. (Kidder, 258)

E.E. Cummings' Writing on the Visual Arts

When writing his 1916 essay "The Poetry of a New Era", Cummings starts off with painting and music, trying to build the case of 'change in taste'. He summarizes his own position in three points – that no art should be viewed in isolation, that people fail to grasp the significance of art and his own allegiance to Cubism (after the initial dislike). (Kidder, 261)

From the twenty-seven-page long original version from 1965 of his essay "The New Art", Cummings emphasizes the change in painting, drawing and poetry, viewing art through its continuous development from Realism through Cubism. In Monet, for example he saw his emphasis on the significance of moment (the change in light that equals the change in color), in the works of the Impressionist he saw the defining moment with emphasis on the significant characteristics (while details were left to the imagination). In the work of Cézanne he recognized primitivism as a search for the fundamental principles (the primitive expressiveness of the spirit that leads to the reaction in the form of a design, trying to see anew, a search for aesthetic qualities) and from Cubism and Futurism (especially in Brâncuși's work) he emphasized the flow of line and continuity of the volume. (Kidder, 264)

The work of Brâncuși enamored Cummings who stressed the essential features of the sculptor's work and the subject, in this case *Le Baiser* (The Kiss) from 1907 which he saw at the Armory Show in which Cummings saw the triumph of line for line's sake. *Le Baiser* had a terrific effect

on him, in it, he felt the sensation of perfect pathos, of utter loneliness and of absolute sublimity (the only other one that awoken in him was *hokku* in Japanese poetry). (Kidder, 265)

The first point be drawn from this essay is his interest in ‘*the moment*’ (the focus of art), which he captured in his drawings of dancers, saloon crowds and strippers, of Mount Chocorua through which he tried to capture a precise moment of light and shadow and in his poems. He was the most successful in singling out a quick image in a poem – single falling leaf, fragment of conversation, view of a park, etc. which resembles the work of the Imagists (but unlike them Cummings reported the thing itself without any explicit assessment of its significance) and of Manet who painted single figures and simple images devoid of any anecdotal significance but out of his pure love for the medium and delight in tone and color. This is what he thought of as representational art – it centered on the moment. (Kidder, 265)

The second point was that there was no need for ‘*the moment*’, as Cummings observes in the work of Cézanne a reaction to the subject in the form of design which is used in contrast to photographic representation. He emphasizes Brâncuși’s triumph of line over realism, as realism and its relation to the abstract interested Cummings a lot. (Kidder, 266)

The Visual Art of E.E. Cummings

The work from Cummings’ early years (1917-27) is abstract, nonobjective art and later he moves towards nature and demands for the respect of the object. Many of the essay’s arguments lead to the conclusion that the highest art may not be in abstraction. This might be the central issue but also the central value of his work – the use of design and realism in order to express feelings. (Kidder, 267)

In his visual art, he tried toward abstraction despite his talent for drawing with photographic faithfulness from which he consciously turns away as he works on nonrepresentational paintings despite having roots in representational images. (Kidder, 268)

This work on nonrepresentational paintings begins with his experiments with Cubist techniques, which can be seen on his early progression of three self-portraits very alike to the African masks Picasso and Braque used. In the portraits, he analyzes and fragments the head into planes – a reaction in the form of design that results in a suppression of detail. (Kidder, 270)

Cummings also experimented with the visual equivalents of sound and created elaborate pencil drawings attempting to render the sound. (Kidder, 271)

When looking deeper into the principles of visual art and how they embody in literature, that is how the parallels of the arts are made, James D. Merriman states arguments for parallelism as ‘a huge game of aesthetic free association with a good sense of chronology’ and how a ‘feature literally present in one art is only figuratively present in another’. What he sees as the only solution is the study of innate form, a comparison of like features in only innate forms proposed by Kenneth Burke first. (Kidder, 275)

Cummings does not translate the principles of one art into the manifestation of another but rather he uses one to call to mind another with frequent reference to visual art by either words that name colors, his own interest in visual imagery, scenes and subjects in the domain of painters (like cityscapes, seascapes, landscapes) and most specifically the Portrait sections describing individuals. (Kidder, 275)

In painting the visible aspects of objects are imitated while language imitates the non-visible entities, meaning that what a poet does is completely reverse to what a painter does. But with

this translation from visible into words there comes a decline in literature since it becomes a world of visual objects. (Kidder, 276)

That's why what Cummings does with his Portrait sections is incredible – describing the inner, rather than the outer. (Kidder, 278)

There are also poems about paintings and painters (not translating the painterly, nonvisual descriptions, comments and descriptions about techniques employed by visual artists – characteristics of a painter's work (Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger* “Thing / which / bulge [...] shut in a sumptuous screech of / simplicity”), he observes the inspiration of one's work, and references the Cubist's device of reducing objects to plane surfaces. (Kidder, 280)

What Cummings showcases in these works is how he is an author who knows more about the details of composition in the visual arts and has the eye and taste of an art critic and hand and interest of a painter to convey the information. He succeeds in describing art in words, but he has not yet imported the aesthetics of the visual arts into the realm of literary composition because of his focus on the subject matter. (Kidder, 280)

The Poetic Work of E.E. Cummings

Merriman states that this interrelationship among arts can be discovered in selection and arrangement of materials of whatever kind as a tool of looking at formal features of arts. From this, we are presented with 'formal features' of Cummings, especially the three which show up consistently in his paintings and poetry. Those are fragmentation and fusion, simultaneity and bilateral symmetry. (Kidder, 281)

Fragmentation and fusion appear the most in the visual arts in the work of Divisionists who analyzed subjects into discrete spots of color which were then synthesized spots into an image

and by the Cubists who emphasized analysis over synthesis (fractured parts of the body, barely recognizable fragments re-fused into a whole) (Kidder, 281)

This reflects in his poetry by the way he was breaking up of the conventional arrangements of stanzas, lines or words into smaller units & combining them into larger ones as it can be seen in his two forms. The first one are poems in which he orders an entire stanza so it takes on a significant visual pattern (unlike George Herbert's shaped verse or Concrete Poets' pictographs, Cummings's verse rarely calls to mind specific objects, in that manner he is far from word-sketching. He sometimes leans towards the pictorial ("the / sky / was" = shaped like a cloud of smoke) and uses visual arrangements to suggest generalized shapes and motions ("as is the sea marvelous"— suggesting the movement of the sea) (Kidder, 282)

Sometimes he fractures and recombines the poem, so it controls the pace of the poem. He makes fragmentation and fusion work together but instead of it being used as a visual it is used as a temporal device correspondent to the devices of rhythm which poets use to control the flow of the poem. (Kidder, 284)

The second formal feature is simultaneity that is the simultaneous presentation of various points of view (evident in his fragmented sketches). This is a device explored by the Cubists (Picasso and *Les Femmes d'Alger*), in Wright's writing on Cézanne and the binocular parallax (seeing around objects, encircling sight that gives us the sensation of rotundity) and even in Cummings' own writing on 'burlesque' in which he sees how 'opposites occur together' which later one becomes true for his own poetry. Cummings claims how the 'burlesque' enables us to know around a thing, character or situation which is usually impossible. (Kidder, 286)

Fragmentation can be also used for simultaneity by creating double meanings or interweaving various threads of narrative so that the narrator's action mingles with something happening simultaneously. (Kidder, 287) This is a device that is literary rather than visual, it can depend

on visual techniques as Cummings himself later notably develops this device. The point of this simultaneity is to allow language to express as much as the visual arts but not to show more than can be seen. The wanted effect is to construct a parallel of painting in poetry. (Kidder, 288)

The last formal feature of Cummings' work is bilateral symmetry. This marks how Cummings divided his work, so each part mirrored each other. Cummings was content with presenting his structures and various ideas he learned from studying composition in the visual arts (balancing equivalents, distribution of emphasis, repetition of forms) and he did not need a solution for his thesis or antithesis. Even his visual work was always divided evenly into a right and left side across which forms and colors are repeated. From his early years of creation, he was sensitive to this principle. (Kidder, 288)

In his poetry it is a major formal device – sometimes being a variation of oxymoron, a literary device that simultaneously presents apparently contradictory terms. His poetry always balances two images one against the other and he propagates this two-part theme-and-variation structure. Bilateral symmetry becomes the guiding principle behind the composition of his various books. Like a painter Cummings composes a larger canvas out of smaller separate forms, composing his volumes of poetry so that even their names suggest a pairing of opposites (like *Tulips and Chimneys*, a name for which he intended opposition since he filled a piece of notepaper with titles exhibiting the same binary principle). He also preserves the two-part division of sonnets and non-sonnets – in & he carried the division even further by contrasting the poems of prurience (*Realities*) with love poems (*Actualities*). His later works still follows this two-part pattern, sometimes being divided neatly in the middle, sometimes beginning “dirty” and ending “clean” as the poet himself would say. But one point out how this principle of symmetry operated throughout his whole career from New York winters and New Hampshire summers but also his contrasted painting and writing. (Kidder, 289)

There has always been tension between the abstract and the representational in Cummings' work. At the end of his twenties his painting turned to representational while his poems became more abstract and while he was not alone among modern poets, he was still very unique and as a painter his interest for all arts went beyond the aesthetic theory and it embodied the painterly. (Kidder, 290)

He exploited the form by using small letters for capitals, eccentric line-endings, punctuation and aberrations and he was able to bring into poetry the aesthetic discoveries of the Cubists and their contemporaries. This applied experimentation of his, his understanding of the principles of painting and his labor to prove himself as a painter and a poet has the greatest impact till this day. (Kidder, 291)

And as the poet himself says: “[s]eeing himself both as an artist and as the material on which an artist is at work, he notes that “in agony of sensual chisels i perform squirms of / chrome and execute strides of cobalt” and that “helpless i utter lilac shrieks and scarlet bellowings”.” (Kidder, 280)

Conclusion

The works of these poets are of immense importance to the development of modernist poetry. Ezra Pound, one of most important figures of modernism, together with T.E. Hulme and T.S. Eliot, revolutionized poetry and re-introduced traditional poetic form and themes while dwelling deeper into Imagism and Vorticism. Pound founded both movements, exploring further what a poem is and could be. The importance of the image (a moment, Pound's 'method of Luminous Detail' and Hulme's poetry of isolated details), symbols and free verse (features of the French Symbolists), Oriental and classical literary works (the study of the language system and the linguistic emphasis on signs and symbols assigned as letters and words) was essential to the work of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams and E.E. Cummings.

William Carlos Williams dedicated his whole life to creating a distinct American expression in poetry. He was awarded with fame and recognition his epic poem *Paterson* brought to him. Implementing some of modernist elements, creating a literary work as a collage (a feature of Cubism he admired in the works of Juan Gris) made of snippets, presented in the traditional poetic form – an epic, introducing the new subject matters, implementing American elements and the elements of the emerging art movements allowed Williams to set a new precedent in American literature.

The use of collage, fractioning, symbols and others are the features originated by the painters. Both painters and poets belonged to these new movements, frequently socializing in the avant-garde scenes. E.E. Cummings went one step further, already being a visual artist. Visual art and poetry merged in the works of E.E. Cummings where its free verse composition of short lines with its lack of capitalizing and use of extended spacing of words and punctuation best showcase the novelties in the visual arts. As if seeking instruction from the painter's image the style of art is used and (re)invented. The poetic and artistic work of E.E. Cummings exerted an irreplaceable influence in the exploration of the poetic structure.

The impact of visual arts on these authors – the mingling in the avant-garde scene, the exploration of the form, meaning and style, the intake of innumerable influences and the overall juxtaposition of all of these elements mark them as some of the most notable figures in modernism.

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