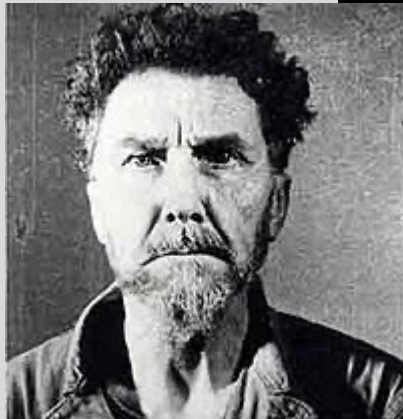




Modern Poetry: The Imagists

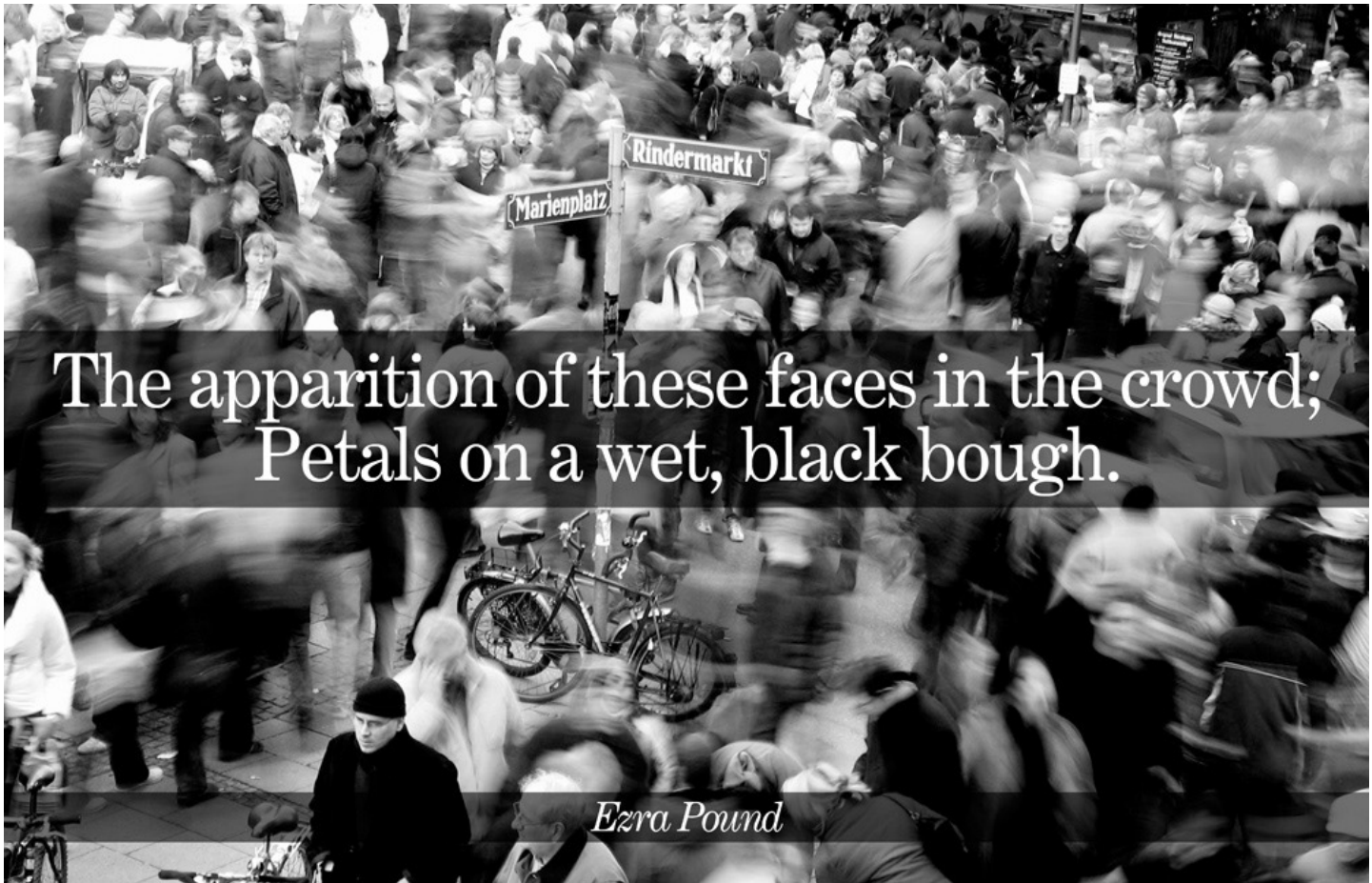
- Poetry was ahead of fiction in finding its Modernist footing
- Imagism was a reaction against the sentimental and romantic poetry of the previous century
 - They preferred a hard, clear voice, concrete images, common language, and unrestricted verse
- Imagism steered poetry away from its previous subjectivity and toward a more objective perspective
- Ezra Pound, a pioneer of the movement, famously instructed his fellow imagists: “**Make it new.**”

Ezra Pound



1. Focus on a single image. Better to present one image in a lifetime than to produce voluminous words on the page
2. Use no superfluous language—no word, no adjective, which does not reveal something.
3. Use concrete images instead of abstraction. The natural object is always the best symbol.
4. Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but acknowledge the debt outright, or try to conceal it.

“In a Station of the Metro”
1913



The apparition of these faces in the crowd;
Petals on a wet, black bough.

Ezra Pound

Modern Poetry: The Objectivists

- Later, some poets moved beyond imagism, favoring an even more experimental poetry that truly captured the fractured and uncertain attitude of a post-war nation
- Archibald MacLeish claimed: “**A poem should not mean but be.**”
- William Carlos Williams called his poetry “objectivist,” insisting that a poem is an “object that formally presents its case and its meaning by the very form it assumes” —*it is what it is*

William Carlos
Williams

- No ideas but things
- Beauty in the “everyday”
- Rhythm—the arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables, line breaks, stanza breaks—becomes the essence of the poetic process as he simply presents the object... and not much else



“The Red Wheelbarrow”
1923

THE RED WHEELBARROW

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

(William Carlos Williams, 1923)

“This Is Just to Say”
1934

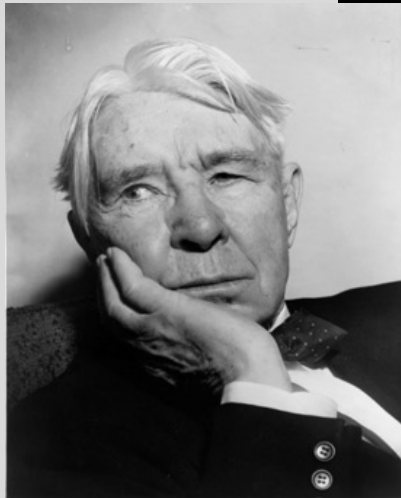


*I have eaten
the plums
that were in
the icebox*

*and which
you were probably
saving
for breakfast*

*Forgive me
they were delicious
so sweet
and so cold*

Carl Sandburg



- “Chicago” (1916)
 - Influenced by French free verse
 - Classical traditions applied to a very modern subject: the city
 - Its filth
 - Its energy
 - Its scrappiness
 - Its industry
 - Essentially, its personality

e.e. cummings



- Total experimentation
- Style becomes the driving force behind his poetry, with the visual shape or structure of a poem conveying or reinforcing its meaning
 - !Punctuation!
 - CaPiTaLiZaTioN
 - **Typography**
 - Letters and Lines
 - Margins and S p a c e s
- One critic: “The poems are made to misbehave”
- “anyone lived in a pretty how town” (1940)

T.S. Eliot

- Saw poetry as an impersonal act of creation involving the combination of “individual talent” and “poetic tradition”—poet as craftsman
- Believed the poet should be above “personal” expressions of “feeling”
- Yet, “Prufrock” seems full of everything modern poetry should not be...Why?
- “Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1917)
 - A stream of consciousness parody of the epic journey of the classical hero
 - Prufrock, our “hero,” lives an “epically” monotonous life of indecision



Robert Frost
(1874-1963)



- A traditionalist among rebels
- Traditional verse
- Conversational language
- Vivid narratives and portraits of America
 - Often accused of Rockwellian nostalgia
- #1 song year of his birth: “I’ll Take You Home Again, Kathleen”
- #1 song year of his death: “Surfin’ USA”
- Popular among critics and the public
 - Four Pulitzer Prizes
 - JFK’s inauguration
- “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”