

## Influences on Modern Poetry

### Existentialism Imagism

### From Romanticism to Naturalism to Existentialism

- Precursors--Soren Kierkegaard, in the 19th century, and Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers in the early 20th century laid the ground work.
- Prominent French Existentialists: Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus,

### Existentialism--What is it?

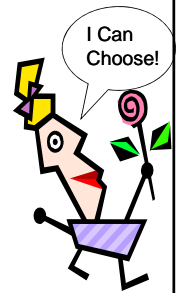
The fundamental premise, that "**existence precedes essence**," is a rejection of the Platonic idea that somewhere, in a perfect existence, there is the ideal human that we should all aspire to become. Existentialism claims that we as human beings have no model, blueprint, no ideal essence, or perfect nature for humans. Rather, we must forge our own values and meaning from existing in an inherently meaningless or absurd world.



Giacometti

### Existentialism--What is it?

- Another characteristic of Existentialism, which sets it off strikingly from Naturalism is the belief that humans do have **free will**. In our existence, we are constantly faced with choices, choices from which we can not escape, since even choosing not to choose or act is a choice.



### Categories of Existentialism

- **Godly**--The godly category acknowledges the existence of God, but views God as distant and scarcely knowable. As a result, humans live lonely lives, filled with anxiety about the choices they must face.
- **Ungodly**-- In the ungodly, or atheistic, category, there is no evidence of any loving, kind supernatural force in the universe.

### Categories of Existentialism

- **Absurd**--For many, the lack of meaning in the universe means that our futile attempts to give meaning and value to our lives deserves ridicule.  
– Catch 22, M\*a\*s\*h, and Slaughterhouse Five are examples.
- **Tragic**--Such works admit the absurdity and irony of human's search for beauty and meaning in a universe of blindly swirling atoms, but view life as as tragic and man as deserving better than to suffer and to die.

### Characteristics of Existentialism-1

- **Existence Before Essence**- As Sartre said, “man is nothing else but what he makes of himself. Such is the first principle of existentialism.” We discover what it means to be human only by existing.



### Humanistic-Existential Theories

- **Humanism:** The view that people are capable of free choice, self-fulfillment, and ethical behavior.
- **Existentialism:** The view that people are completely free and responsible for their own behavior.

### Self-Actualization

- An innate tendency to strive to realize one's potential. The goal to “be all you can be”.
- Abraham Maslow believed that we progress from one level to the next, but only if the needs of the prior level are met. Thus, self-actualization is difficult if we are homeless.



### Characteristics of Existentialism-2

- **Reason is impotent to deal with all aspects of life**--our human minds cannot grasp all there is to reality; in fact, our minds, our intentionality, impose form upon the objective, material world, distorting reason and reality.
- The suspicion of rationality was expressed by Pascal: “**The heart has its reasons which reason cannot know.**”

### Characteristics of Existentialism-3

- **Alienation and Estrangement**-- Humankind, owing partly to the growing dependence on reason and science, has become increasingly alienated--from God, from nature, from other humans, and from our own selves. We live in a spiritual desert, barren of hope and love.

### Characteristics of Existentialism-4

- **“Fear and trembling,” or anxiety**-- With the loss of reliance on God and the unsureness of human reason, individuals are left with agonizing choices and personal responsibility. We are dependent upon our own wills to determine the course of our lives. That huge responsibility, without sure reason to guide us, causes us great anxiety. Also, because of advances in technology, the world has become a place that could be destroyed at any time.

### Characteristics of Existentialism-5

- **The encounter with nothingness--**  
With the loss of God's immanence, nature and the universe have been emptied of meaning, order, purpose, and love. Existentialist writers often portray a person confronting the abyss, the probable meaninglessness of the universe and their own actions within that universe. This existential crisis is often a test of a person and the courage s/he maintains.

### Existentialism--Summary

Much of modern literature, philosophy, and art portrays the world as lonely or meaningless. Existential protagonists are often lonely, anxiety ridden characters who are trying to make sense of their lives, or who are trying to retain their courage in spite of the fact that the universe cares nothing for those things we call beautiful or good.

### Existentialist Poems--Stephen Crane

- I saw a man pursuing the horizon:/ Round and round they sped. / I was disturbed at this:/ I accosted the man./ "It is futile," I said,/ You can never--/ "You lie," he cried,/ and ran on.
- A man said to the universe:/ "Sir, I exist!"/ "However," replied the universe,/ "The fact has not created in me / A sense of obligation."

### Imagists -- Influences and Characteristics

- Ancient Greek Lyrics
- Japanese Haiku
- Written in free verse, precise and terse, expressed in common speech, using precise words, presenting an image that is hard, clear, and concentrated, suggesting rather than offering complete statements. (A. Lowell)

### Imagists -- Influences: Ancient Greek Lyrics

- Like the hyacinth/ there is a light/ blinding my eyes.
- One day I watched a tender girl/picking some wild flowers
- I will never find again/ honey or the honey bee. (Sapho)
- Pelagon the fisherman. His father / Meniskos placed here a fishbasket/ and oar: relics of a wretched life.
- His cloak was of a cloth/ handspun from many colors. (Sapho)

### Imagists -- Influences: Haiku

- Ah the falling snow. . ./ Imagine dancing/ Butterflies flitting/ Through the flakes. (Oeharu)
- Poppy petals fall/ Softly quietly/ Calmly/ When they are ready. (Etsujin)
- This old hat, stolen/ From a scare-crow. . ./ How fiercely/ The cold rain pelts if! (Kyoshi)
- The oak tree stands/ Noble on the hill; Even in/ Chery blossom time. (Basho)

Imagist Poems

In a Station of the Metro

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

Ezra Pound

Imagist Poems

Alba

As cool as the pale wet leaves  
of lily-of-the-valley  
She lay beside me  
in the dawn.

Ezra Pound

Imagist Poems

The Red Wheelbarrow

so much depends  
upon

a red wheel  
barrow

glazed with rain  
water

beside the white  
chickens.

W. C. Williams

Imagist Poems

**Ars Poetica**

A poem should be palpable and mute

As a globed fruit

Dumb

As old medallions to the thumb

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone

Of casement ledges where the moss has grown--

A poem should be wordless

As the flight of birds

A poem should be motionless in time

As the moon climbs

Leaving, as the moon releases

Twig by twig the night-entangled trees,

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leaves,

Memory by memory the mind--

Imagist Poems

**Ars Poetica (con't)**

A poem should be motionless in time

As the moon climbs

A poem should be equal to:

Not true

For all the history of grief

An empty doorway and a maple leaf

For love

The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea--

A poem should not mean

But be.

Archibald MacLeish

Imagist Poems

**Wind and Silver**

Greatly shining,

The Autumn moon floats in the thin sky;

And the fish-ponds shake their back and

flash their dragon scales

As she passes over them.

Amy Lowell

## Imagist Poems

### A Decade

When you came, you were like red wine  
and honey,  
And the taste of you burnt my mouth  
with its sweetness.  
Now you are like morning bread,  
I hardly taste you at all for I know your  
savor,  
But I am completely nourished.  
Amy Lowell

## Imagist Poem

Reber

Mung

My chopper settled on the jungle floor  
While war and mangoes lay heavy in the trees.  
Mung slipped through steaming bowls of rice,  
Bearing fruit-sliced, salt-crushed, and  
Love-whole.  
Deftly, she sifted out the years, bamboo, and  
Tin to find my ready heart.

## Imagist Poems

Squatted on a bamboo bed, among gray-haired,  
Toothless, grinning elders,  
We sipped coke and nibbled at romance.  
Her bright eyes could not let me go--her  
Brown feet followed my blood-shod boots.  
At parting, I knelt, all khaki-green  
Beside her peasant black.

## Imagist Poem

Reber

My gift, a tiny chain--and tin--was  
Little proof of love,  
Yet  
As my chopper rose, that tiny point of black  
Was all that held the green  
Together.