


A Brief
History of
English
Poetry

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Periods of British Literature

- 600 – 1200 Old English (Anglo Saxon) Beowulf
- 1200 – 1500 Middle English Geoffrey Chaucer
- 1500 – 1660 The English Renaissance

- 1500 – 1558 Tudor period (Humanist era) ---
Thomas More, John Skeleton
- 1558 -1603 Elizabethan Period (High Renaissance) --
- Edmund Spenser, Sir philip Sidney

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- **1603 – 1625 Jacobean Period (Mannerist Style (1590-1640) other style: Metaphysical poets; Devotional Poets ---- Shakespeare, John Donne, George Herbert**
 - **1625 – 1649 Caroline Period --- John Ford, John Milton**
 - **1649 – 1660 The commonwealth & the protectorate (Baroque style and later Rocco style) --- Milton, Andrew Marvell. Thomas Hobbes**

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- **1660-1700 The Restoration ---- John Dryden**
 - **1700 – 1800 Eighteen Century (The Enlightenment; Neoclassical Period; The Augustan Age) --- Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Johnson**
 - **1785-1830 Romanticism (The age of Revolution) --- William Wordsworth, Coleridge**

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- **1830-1901 Victorian Period (Realism) --- Robert Browning, Lord Tennyson**
 - **1901-1960 Modern Period (The Edwardian Era (1901 – 1910); The Georgian Era (1910 – 1914)) --- Hopkins, T S Elliot, Yeats**
 - **1960 – Post Modern --- Doris Lessing, Ted Hughes**

Anglo Saxon



- The Anglo Saxon base words largely connected with agricultural, Physical life, is built upon by the Normans, who brought with them a language whose own native qualities were enriched by words fro Latin and Greek
- *Reste hine thâ rúm-heort; réced hlifade Geáp and góld-fâh, gäst inne swäf.*

Rested him then the great-hearted; the hall towered
Roomy and gold-bright, the guest slept within.

Conventions of Anglo Saxon Lyric Poetry

- Use of caesura or pause mid-line
- Use of alliteration to connect the two parts
- Typically, four stressed syllables
- Use of kennings: two word metaphors (sea – whale road; ship – sea horse)
- Didactic in nature: teach and entertain
- Combination of Christian & Pagan imagery



Middle English



- **Chaucer** (c. 1343-1400)

- His early works were often cast in the form of allegory and dream
- The Canterbury Tales



The Canterbury Tales (1380s)

24 tales and a framing prologue that sets up the fiction of pilgrims meeting at a tavern as they begin their pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas a Becket in Canterbury. Each agrees to tell a tale. The tales are linked by prologues. The narrator begins the prologue by describing the fine April day and each of the pilgrims in his entourage. Some characters: Knight, Miller, Wife of Bath, Prioress, Nun's Priest, Squire, Reeve, Pardoner, Summoner, Cook, Man of Law, Oxford Scholar, etc.

Medieval Lyrics: Both Secular and Religious

13th – 15th Centuries. Lyric poems, some of which were set to music. Themes: love, the beauty of the beloved, the seasons, the pain of unrequited love, Religious themes, Biblical and liturgical themes, devotion to the virgin Mary, other devotional themes.

Cuckoo Song: “Sumer is ycomen in,
Loude sing cuckou!”

Western Wind: “Western wind, when will thou blow?
The small rain down can rain.
Christ, that my love were in my arms,
And I in my bed again.”



Edmund Spenser

The Faerie Queene (1590; 1596) A LONG narrative poem, an allegorical epic in six books.

Each book contains twelve cantos, each of which contains At least 40 stanza.

Each stanza is composed of nine lines. 1-8 are iambic pentameter, and 9 is iambic hexameter (alexandrine); each stanza is rhymed ababbcbcc. This form is called a Spenserian stanza.

Phillip Sidney (1554-1586)

The Countess of Pembroke's *Arcadia* (1578-83). A prose pastoral romance dealing with shepherds and courtly people disguised as shepherds. The plot involves mistaken identities, disguises, amazon women, crossdressed men, wild coincidences, melodramatic incidents, and tangled love intrigues.

The Defense of Poesy (1579; published 1595). An important prose defense of poetry in which Sidney argues for the dignity, moral importance, and social effectiveness of poetry, which teaches and delights so that one will aspire toward virtue and shun vice.



The sixteenth century

English Renaissance

- religious reformation
- the Commercial Expansion
- the War with Spain



The Renaissance, 16th and 17th centuries.

- The highest form was the *epic*, and it only concerned the most exalted subjects—Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.
- The next highest was *tragedy*, which usually involved the fall of kings.



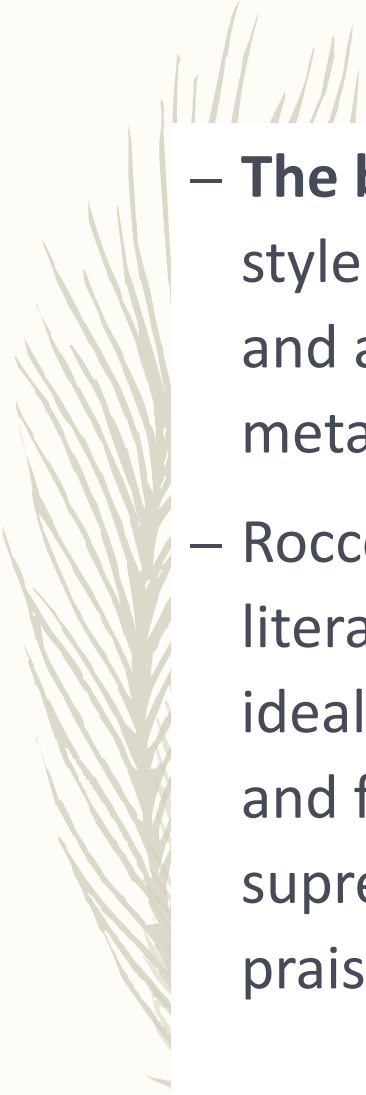


English Renaissance

- **Feature(1):** a thirsty curiosity for the classical literature
- **Feature(2):** the keen interest in the activities of humanity
- **Humanism:** It reflected the new outlook of the rising bourgeois class. According to them, both man and world are hindered only by external checks from infinite improvement. Man could mould the world according to his desires, and attain happiness by removing all external checks by the exercise of reason.

More Genres from the Renaissance

- *Pastoral*—involved lords and ladies in love
- the *lyric*--usually the expression of personal emotion.
- *Comedy* could involves the middle class
- *Farce*—common people

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- **The baroque in literature.** The main features of the literary style known as baroque are a great emphasis on originality and an overabundance of stylistic devices, particularly metaphors, hyperboles, and antitheses
 - Rococo Style is the extreme form of Baroque. Rococo literature is refined and elegant but lacks depth and civic ideals. It has no place for heroism and duty; courtly games and frivolous insouciance reign supreme. Hedonism is the supreme “wisdom” of the rococo, with poets singing the praises of idleness

John Skeleton



- The priest at the court of Henry VIII
- Conventional poetical
- Rhythm is often merely slick, his satire shrill and noisy and imprecise

GO Piteous Heart

O, pytyous hart, rasyd with dedly wo,
Persyd with payn, bleding with wondes smart,
Bewayle thy fortune, with vaynys wan and blo.
O Fortune vnfrendly, Fortune vnkynde thow art,
To be so cruell and so ouerthwart,
To suffer me so carefull to endure,
That wher I loue best I dare not dyscure !

GO, piteous heart, raised with deadly woe,
Persued with pain, bleeding with woundes smart,
Bewail thy fortune, with vanity's wan and blow.
O Fortune unfriendly, Fortune unkinde thou art,
To be so cruel and so overthwart,
To suffer me so careful to endure,
That where I love best I dare not disclose !

William Shakespeare

– 154 sonnets; 37 plays

(1) 1590-1594 Romeo and Juliet

(2) 1595-1600 The Merchant of Venice

(3) 1601-1607 Hamlet; Othello; King Lear;
Macbeth

(4) 1608-1612 The Winter's Tale; The
Tempest


William Shakespeare



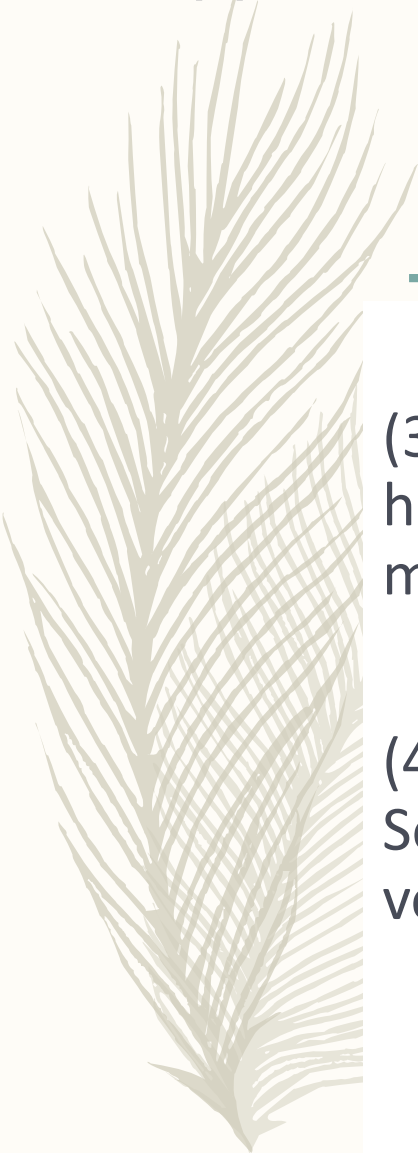
(1) Shakespeare is one of the founders of realism in world literature.

Engels: Realism implies, besides truth in detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstance.

(2) Shakespeare's dramatic creation often used the method of adaptation. He borrowed his plots widely from Greek legends and Roman history, from Italian stories and English chronicles, and from romances by his English contemporaries.



William Shakespeare



(3) Shakespeare's long experience with the stage and his intimate knowledge of dramatic art thus acquired make him a master-hand for play-writing.

(4) Shakespeare was skilled in many poetic forms: the Song; the sonnet; the couplet; the dramatic blank verse.

William Shakespeare

(5) Shakespeare was a great master of the language. He commanded a vocabulary larger than any other English writer. He used about 16,000 words. Many of his new coinages and turns of expression have become everyday usage in English life. Shakespeare and the Authorized Version of the English Bible are the two great treasuries of the English language.

Shakespeare has been universally acknowledged to be the summit of the English renaissance, and one of the greatest writers the world over.



John Donne (1572-1631) & the Metaphysical Poets/ Jacobean Period

Metaphysical poetry is characterized by:

- energetic, rough, or uneven movement, unlike the studied elegance, sweetness, and smoothness of 16th century verse

- elaborate, strained, or far-fetched “conceits”;

 - dazzling displays of wit

- a tendency toward logical argumentation or the structure of an argument in a poem

 - an interest in philosophical questions and speculation

Donne's Works:

- Songs and Sonnets (not printed in his life time; begun in 1595 and probably written over the next 20 years)

“The Flea”

“The Good Morrow”

“Song”

“The Sun Rising” (an aubade or dawn poem)

“The Canonization”

- *Holy Sonnets*. Nineteen religious sonnets as part of his *Divine Poems*.

- Sermons. As an Anglican preacher, Donne preached Volumes of sermons, including his last, *Deaths Duell*

Other Metaphysical Poets:

George Herbert (1593-1633) *The Temple* (1633)

“The Altar”

“Redemption”

“Easter Wings”

“Affliction I”

“Church Monuments” “The Windows”

“The Collar”

“Death”

“Love”

Henry Vaughan (1621-1695) *Silex Scintillans*

“Regeneration,” “The Retreat,” “The World”

“They Are All Gone into the World of Light,”

“Cock-Crowing”



The 18th C., also called the **neo-classical** period

- Poets called for **restraint**--restrained emotions and restrained style. The 18th century distrusted emotion, in part because the 18th century was a violent time of revolution and war, and people wanted restraint.
- Poetry, they said, should be like prose, only more polished.

18th Century Forms



– The dominant form was the **heroic couplet--**
iambic pentameter rhyming couplets.

– Alexander Pope:

"True wit is nature to advantage dressed,
What oft was said, but ne'er so well
expressed."

iamb--unstressed stressed

– rhyming couplet--aa bb cc etc.

Romantic Poetry



- In the first half of the 19th c., Wordsworth called for poetry written in the language of men, not an artificially literary language
- His longer and most serious poems are in blank verse, iambic pentameter that is unrhymed.

Other Romantics



- The other **Romantics (the early 19th c. British poets-- Blake, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley, Keats and others)** believed in expressing great emotion in their poetry, not like WW. Their poems are often highly charged, dramatic, intense, and their object was to reproduce their own, subjective sense of truth. This was the greatest period of English poetry.



Lasting Influence of the Romantics

- From this period, people have believed that poetry should be the expression of great emotion, and that the true poet should live on the margins, in a garret, and die of consumption, like John Keats, who died of consumption (TB) at the age of 25.

Portrait of John Keats by Severin



William Blake



- Blake was often guided by his gentle and mystical views of Christianity
- The Little Black Boy: published in 1789. His poem tells of how a black child came to discover – through the teachings of his mother – his own identity as well as God.
- Blake's —The Little Black Boy|| seems to be full of innocence and naivety, which is mainly due to two factors: the author's treatment of the black characters and their perception of the future. Blake depicts them as innocent, naive, childish, having interiorized an inferior status.


Victorian Age



Robert Frost (1874-1963) was born in San Francisco, California.

Frost's best-known poems: 'Mending Wall,' 'The Death of the Hired Man,' 'Home Burial,' 'A Servant to Servants,' 'After Apple-Picking,' and 'The Wood-Pile.'

The poems, written with blank verse or looser free verse of dialogue, were drawn from his own life, recurrent losses, everyday tasks, and his loneliness.



Elizabeth Barrett Browning



Elizabeth Barrett Browning (6 March 1806 – 29 June 1861) was one of the most prominent poets of the Victorian era. Her poetry was widely popular in both England and the United States during her lifetime

Elizabeth Barrett Browning opposed slavery and published two poems highlighting the barbarity of slavers and her support for the abolitionist cause. The poems opposing slavery include "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" and "A Curse for a Nation"; in the first she describes the experience of a slave woman who is whipped, raped, and made pregnant as she curses the slavers.

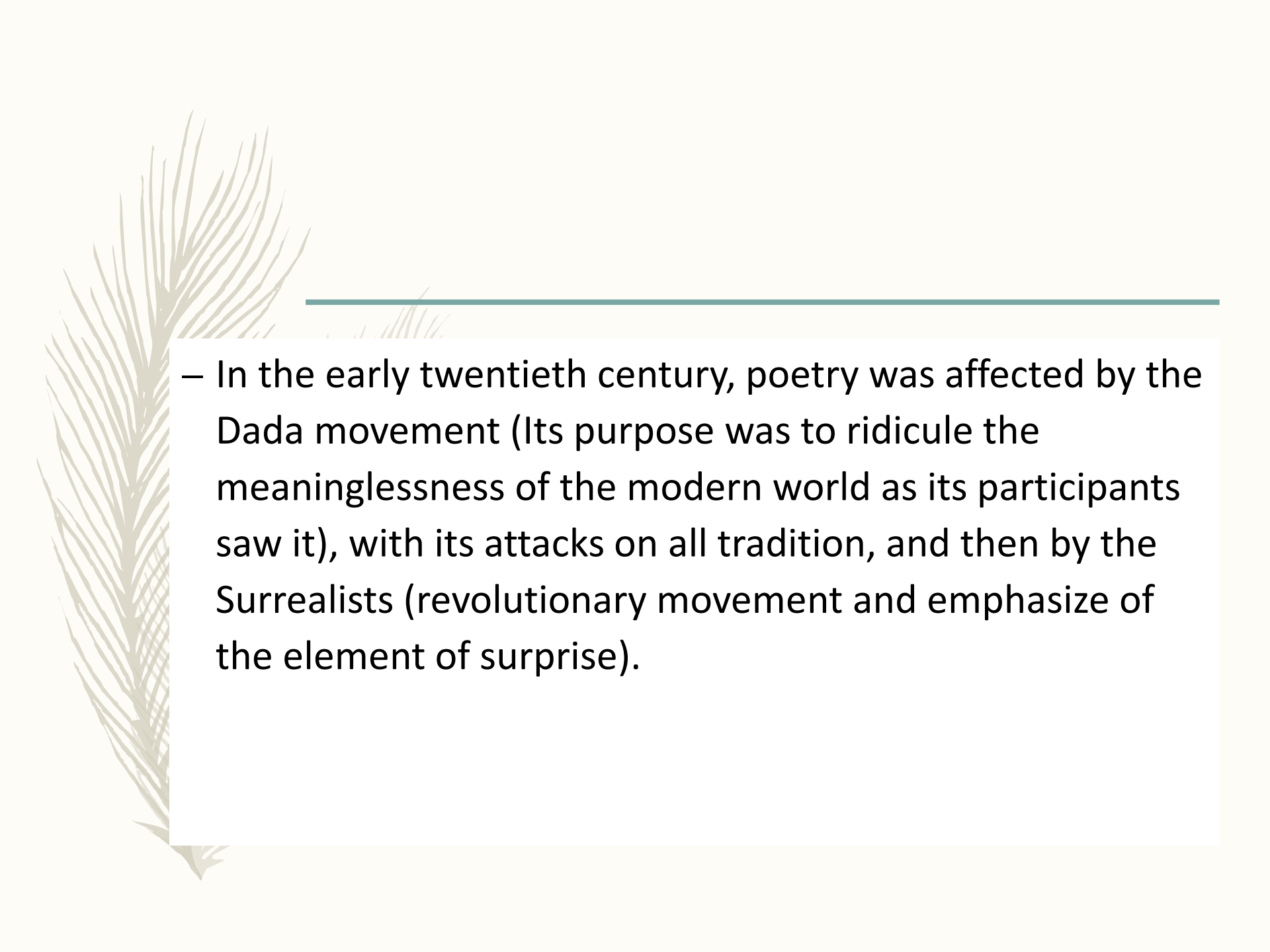
Moderns

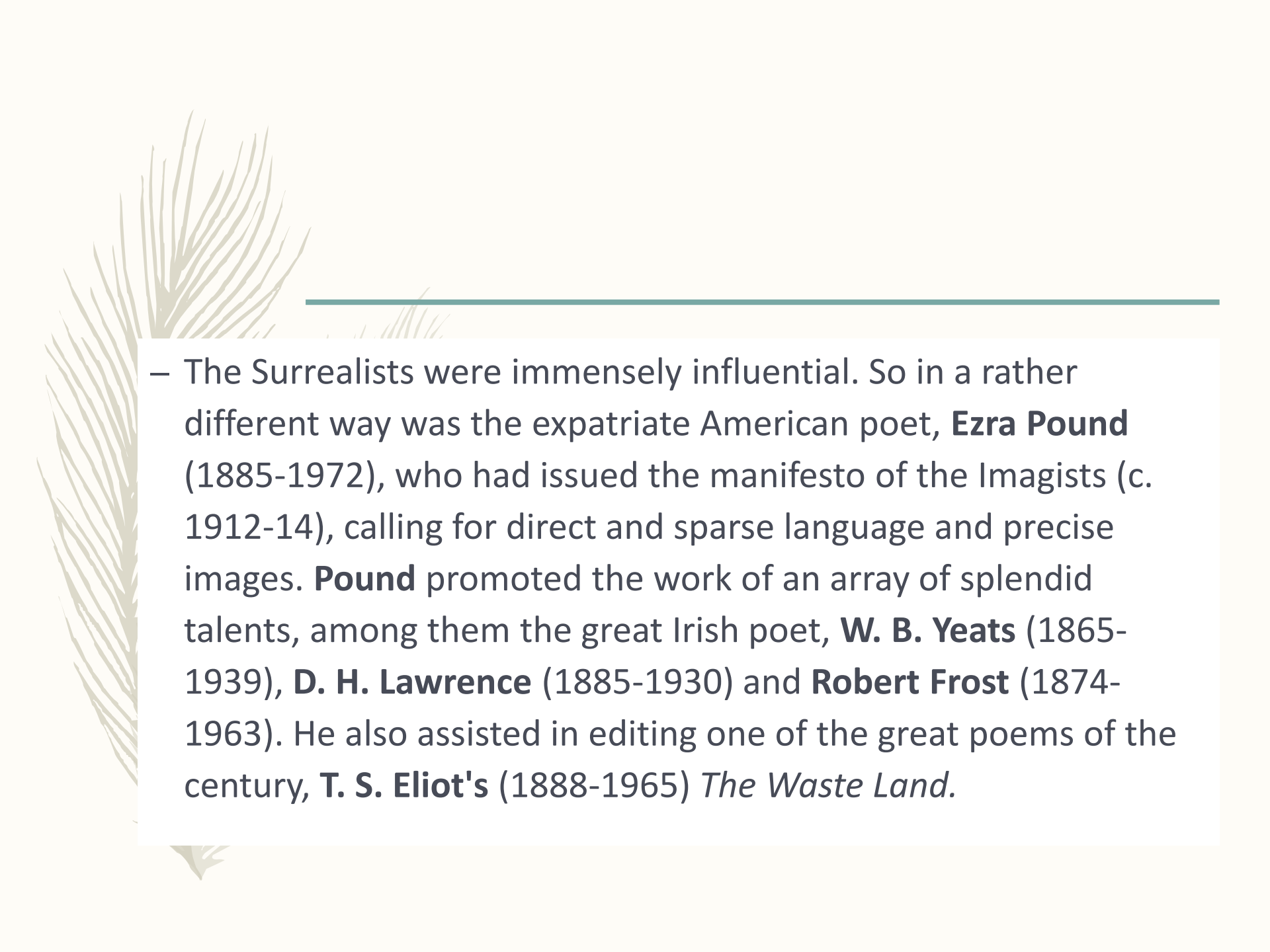


- Early 20th c. poets reacted to this--TS Eliot wanted poets to go back to the restraint of the 18th c. But the biggest development of modern poetry was the breakdown (or liberation, depending how you feel about it) of poetic form.

Modern Poetry

- In the nineteenth century, influential experiments in metre were made by **Gerard Manley Hopkins** (1844-89) and the American **Walt Whitman** (1819-92). **Hopkins** invented a 'sprung rhythm' suggesting natural speech, and in the United States, **Whitman** produced a free-verse style which was widely emulated.
- Poetry now gradually came under the same influences as those that affected painting and music, and which made twentieth-century styles so different from those of all preceding periods.

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- In the early twentieth century, poetry was affected by the Dada movement (Its purpose was to ridicule the meaninglessness of the modern world as its participants saw it), with its attacks on all tradition, and then by the Surrealists (revolutionary movement and emphasize of the element of surprise).



– The Surrealists were immensely influential. So in a rather different way was the expatriate American poet, **Ezra Pound** (1885-1972), who had issued the manifesto of the Imagists (c. 1912-14), calling for direct and sparse language and precise images. **Pound** promoted the work of an array of splendid talents, among them the great Irish poet, **W. B. Yeats** (1865-1939), **D. H. Lawrence** (1885-1930) and **Robert Frost** (1874-1963). He also assisted in editing one of the great poems of the century, **T. S. Eliot's** (1888-1965) *The Waste Land*.

Post Modern Poetry




- Fluid subject matter, open (free verse) forms, inward-centered themes, a mistrust of official language

Donald Allen (New American Poetry)

- In the Back Mountain School were Olson, Creeley, and Dorn, poets who believed that lines should be constructed on the pattern of taking breath rather than by syllable or metre.

Doris Lessing



- Full name Doris May Lessing; has also written under the pseudonym Jane Somers
 - Persian-born English novelist, short story writer, essayist, dramatist, poet, nonfiction writer, journalist, and travel writer
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Doris Lessing

Fable

“When I look back I seem to remember singing.
Yet it was always silent in that long warm room.

Impenetrable , those walls , we thought,
Dark with ancient shields. The light
Shone on the head of a girl or young limbs
Spread carelessly. And the low voices
Rose in the silence and were lost as in water.