

Amy Lowell
1874-1925

Born in Brookline, Massachusetts to a prominent Bostonian family, Amy Lowell was descended from the Lowles of Somersetshire who immigrated to the United States in the seventeenth century. She was raised on a ten-acre estate with a full staff of servants and lived most of her life there along with Ada Dwyer Russell, a devoted companion.

Lowell was tutored at home and later attended private school in Boston. Once her formal education was completed at age seventeen, she studied further in her father's library at the estate. While one of her brothers was a prominent astronomer and the other was the president of Harvard, Lowell settled on being a poet. Her first poem published as an adult appeared in 1910 in the *Atlantic Monthly*. During 1911 and 1912 a few more poems appeared in print. Then in October of 1912 her first collection, *A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass*, was published by Houghton Mifflin.

It was 1913 when Lowell discovered several poems written by "H. D., Imagiste." She identified with this author and this movement and persuaded Harriet Monroe to give her a letter of introduction to Ezra Pound. In the summer of 1913 Amy Lowell sailed for London. Lowell's introduction to Pound, and their ensuing friendship, gave her admittance to an elite group that included Ford Madox Hueffer, Hilda Doolittle (H. D.), and Richard Aldington. She also met John Gould Fletcher and Henry James. Upon returning to Boston, Lowell began her promotion of Imagism. In 1914 she made a second trip to London, but found the atmosphere less agreeable than on the first visit. She broke with Pound, but she did meet D. H. Lawrence and Thomas Hardy, and her friendship with these two men lasted the rest of her life. When she returned to the United States, she published three imagist anthologies and continued to promote Imagism, but now her version under her guidelines. While Pound eventually left this movement, Lowell embraced it throughout her career as a writer.

As well as publishing nine volumes of poetry, Lowell also wrote a biography of John Keats and published two volumes of critical essays. She was a tireless editor, literary agent, and imagist promoter. She is best remembered for her skills as biographer, critic, reviewer, and spokesperson for modern poetry. She is also remembered for her eccentricity. She was a large woman, outspoken, frequently clad in masculine clothing and smoking a cigar. There is the often-recounted story about the day her car broke down. She stopped at a garage to have it repaired and told the mechanic to charge it to her brother Lawrence, the president of Harvard. The mechanic called him saying, "Some big, fat dame whose engine broke down wants to charge the bill to you—claims she's your sister." When her brother asked what she was doing, the mechanic replied, "She's across the road, sittin' on a stone wall, smokin' a cigar." "That's my sister, all right," Lowell assured the mechanic.

Amy Lowell was plagued with health problems, especially hernias, from 1916. She slowed down little even for operations and convalescences. On Good Friday, May 10, 1925, while preparing to leave for another trip to England, she suffered a severe hernia attack, and had to cancel the trip and schedule surgery instead. On Easter Sunday, May 12, she got out of bed, defying doctor's orders and was sitting in front of

her mirror when she noticed numbness in her left hand and watched the right side of her face fall. Amy Lowell was having a stroke. She lost consciousness. In less than two hours this colorful and dedicated pioneer in modern poetry was gone.

--L. Margaret Pomeroy

Sources Used:

<almanac.mpr.org/docs/01_02_05.htm>

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