



# Many Gods and Many Voices: The Role of the Prophet in English and American Modernism (Practice; 6)

*Louis L. Martz*

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In *Many Gods and Many Voices* distinguished scholar Louis L. Martz addresses works by Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, H. D., and D. H. Lawrence, with brief treatment of the relation of Pound's *Cantos* to Joyce's *Ulysses*. In a graceful, lucid style, Martz argues that a prophetic tradition is represented in the *Cantos*, *The Waste Land*, *Paterson*, and H. D.'s *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt*, along with Lawrence's *Plumed Serpent* and the second version of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Pound's often-cited view that an epic is a poem that "includes history" does not define epic alone, for the books of biblical prophecy also contain history: the history of Israel's misdeeds and continuous redemption.

On the other hand, Martz suggests that the term *prophecy* should not be limited to works that foretell the future, arguing that the biblical prophet is concerned primarily with the present. The prophet is a reformer, a denouncer of evil, as well as a seer of possible redemption. He hears "voices" and transmits the message of those voices to his people, in the hope of moving them away from wickedness and toward the ways of truth. According to Martz, such was the mission that inspired Walt Whitman and that Whitman passed on to Pound, Eliot, Williams, and Lawrence. (H. D. found her own sources of inspiration in Greek and Egyptian lore.)

Martz's premise is that biblical prophecy, with its mingling of poetry and prose, its abrupt shifts from violent denunciation to exalted poetry, provides a precedent for the texture of these modernist works that will help readers to appreciate the mingling of "voices" and the complex mixture of elements. Examining their interrelationships and their common themes, *Many Gods and Many Voices* offers fresh insights into these modern writers.

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