

A STUDY  
OF THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN THE POETRY AND CRITICISM  
OF EZRA POUND  
1908-1920

"Tu puoj sichuramente gir chanzone  
Dove ti piace ch'i' t'o sí ornata  
Ch'assa lodata sará tua ragione  
Dalle persone ch'anno intendimento  
Di star con l'altre tu non aj talento:-"

(Cavalcanti: Donna Mi Priegha)

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PREFACE.

The status of T.S.Eliot and James Joyce is universally recognised; the importance of the contributions which they have made to the literature of the 20th. Century in particular and to English Literature as a whole is firmly established - to the extent that their ideas and methods are imitated and worshipped ad nauseam by aspiring writers in University English Departments everywhere.

It would thus not be unreasonable to expect that some study would also be made of the considerable amount of poetry and prose published by the man who, perhaps more than anyone else, initially brought Joyce and Eliot to the attention of the literate public. Ezra Pound's critical foresight and appreciation with regard to their work emerge first in his letters: in 1914 he considered "Prufrock" to be "the most interesting contribution I have yet had from an American", and a year later he vehemently announced that it alone deserved the award of the prize which Poetry (Chicago) was then offering for American verse. He arranged for the serialisation in The Egoist of A Portrait of the Artist, and mentioned Joyce as "one of the two strongest prose writers among les jeunes." (The other was D.H.Lawrence.) But critical foresight is perhaps not sufficient evidence; poetic ability and integrity must also be considered, and in this essay I have tried to correlate the two in order to show Pound's central position in modern writing.

Recently an evergrowing spate of books and articles on his work has appeared in America,

stimulated, no doubt, by the publicity attaching to the award of the Bollingen Prize for his Pisan Cantos in 1948, and also by the position into which his political and economic views have led him. It is clear, in spite of and even because of the bigoted attacks on his writing and on his character in The Saturday Review of Literature and The Partisan Review, that his importance has finally been accepted in his own country. In England, except for the efforts of a small group of enthusiasts, Pound is neglected; and in South African Universities, his work, when approached at all, is treated with suspicious circumspection. It is quite definitely 'a field for the specialist', and so it is left out of the curriculum, and the students of English Literature here are unwittingly the poorer for the omission.

The purpose of this thesis is exposition rather than criticism. Pound's position in the hierarchy of the 'New Criticism' would provide an extremely interesting subject; but I have rather tried to outline the standards which he has laid down as being central in the technics of good poetry, and to show how closely he has adhered to them in his own verse. I have limited the period to be discussed because all of the essential principles which he employs in his writing after 1920 are discernible in the body of his work published before that date.

Pound is still writing. At one time it seemed doubtful as to whether the Cantos, "the only poem of some length by a contemporary" which Eliot finds it possible to read "with enjoyment and admiration", would

ever be finished, but since 1955 new instalments have appeared fairly regularly, and it would now seem that his *Odyssey* will, after all, be completed. In 1917 a draft of the first three Cantos was published; but Pound almost immediately withdrew it, and the poems were scrapped. A completely revised version was published in 1921. I have refrained from discussing the Cantos for two reasons: they fall outside the limit which I set myself, and they are in themselves a subject for a thesis, and one which cannot with any real confidence be written until the whole sequence is finished. The present essay may, in one sense, be taken as an introduction to a study of the poem.

Another side of Pound's astonishingly prolific output is altogether outside the scope of the essay. I refer to his numerous economic studies, which from the literary point of view are interesting for the light they shed on the 'Money Cantos'.

I submit that Pound is the example par excellence of the conscious literary artist. The majority of his poems written prior to 1917 are conscious exercises; they are, as F.R. Leavis says of the work of another poet, "frankly 'composed'"; and this is no adverse reflection on their poetic worth. Their 'composition' follows with precision and exactitude their author's published opinions on the way to write poetry; in other words, Pound's criticism serves as a perpetual criterion for his poetry. Eliot, in treating of the criticism of the man who is also a poet, says that it is always possible that criticism

"is...at its best, an account of the poet's  
experience of his own poetic activity, related in

terms of his own mind. The critical mind operating in poetry, the critical effort which goes to the writing of it, may always be in advance of the critical mind operating upon poetry, whether it be one's own or someone else's."

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This perceptive statement applies particularly in Pound's case.

The stable critical principle recurring throughout his books and articles from the earliest awakenings of the Imagistes until the most recent Cantos is the desire for the concrete image as opposed to the generalised abstraction; the clear-cut presentation of a 'thing' in highly charged language as opposed to the expression of an idea blurred by the over-enthusiastic use of descriptive adjectives. This theory began as a purely literary one, but as his interests widened, Pound carried it over into his writings on economics and politics; and as I have indicated in the following pages, there is a direct line between his concern with the health of the idiom of literature as expressed in his literary criticism, and his concern for the health of society as a whole.

"To call people and things by their names, that is by the correct denominations...If the terminology be not exact, if it fit not the thing, the governmental instructions will not be explicit, if the instructions aren't clear and the names don't fit you can not conduct business properly.

If business is not properly run the rites and music will not be honoured, if the rites and music be not honoured, penalties and punishments will not achieve their intended effects, if penalties and punishments do not produce equity and justice, the people won't know where to put their feet or what to lay hold of or to whom they shd. stretch out their hands.

That is why an intelligent man cares for his terminology and gives instructions that fit. When his orders are clear and explicit they can be put into effect. An intelligent man is neither inconsiderate of others nor futile in his commanding."

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1. The Use of Poetry and The Use of Criticism. pp.29-30.
  2. Guide to Kulchur. pp.16-17. (2nd. ed.) This is a condensed part of a translation of Confucius' Analects, which Pound recommends for study instead of Greek.

Pound's insistence on clarity and precision of wording have, more than any other force, determined the various techniques of modern poetry. His criticism, "the notes of a poet on his craft" as Eliot calls it, forms the most valuable 'manual' on poetry which the poet of today could hope to possess, and his poetry ranks with that of the recognised modern masters. It is to be hoped that his importance will be appreciated in South African Universities in the near future.

It is my privilege to be able to acknowledge here the help given to me so willingly by so many people; without them this thesis would have remained a stack of random notes. I owe a large debt of gratitude to Mr. Pound himself, whose advice has been of the greatest assistance; he also enabled me to make contact with three gentlemen without whom I could never have obtained the necessary books - Mr. Peter Russell, of Fairwarp, England; Mr. William Cookson, of London; and Mr. Charles Martell, formerly at St. Lawrence University, N.Y., and now at the Sorbonne. Mr. Russell, besides providing me with many of Pound's books now out of print, indicated much collateral reading matter of which I had not been aware. My supervisors, Mr. A. G. Woodward, now at the University of Cape Town, and Dr. J. R. Wahl of the Rhodes University Department of English, have been most generous and understanding in their guidance. Their appreciation of the difficulties involved in obtaining the necessary materials, and their constructive criticism of my efforts have made it a pleasure to work under them. I am pleased to be able to thank Prof. J.-L. Cattaneo and Mlle. G. Jewell, of the Rhodes University French Department, for reading the section

dealing with Symbolism; Mr. H. Hewitt, Senior Lecturer in the Rhodes University Department of Classics, now at the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, for reading the section on classical rhythms, and for answering with patience what must have seemed to him to be alarmingly elementary questions on Latin verse; and Prof. J. Irving, of the Rhodes University Department of Social Science, who gave me the benefit of his knowledge of Chinese Literature and lent me books on the subject which were of great assistance. The reference-staff of The State Library, Pretoria; The South African Public Library, Cape Town; The Cape Town Municipal Library; The Johannesburg Municipal Library; and the Rhodes University Library have given generously of their time in attempts to obtain books for me, and their friendliness has been much appreciated. My friend Mr. A. E. Voss was good enough to read each chapter and criticise my work with an amicable but unprejudiced eye; to him and to my other friends at Rhodes I offer my thanks for their stimulating interest. I am deeply grateful to Mr. T. Plews, of Johannesburg, for giving me all the wax sheets and paper necessary for the reproduction of the thesis; the Public Utility Transport Corporation for allowing me the use of their duplicating machine; and my mother, who surrendered her leisure time to cutting the wax sheets. Her enthusiasm has been immeasurably helpful. Without the generosity of my late father I should never have been in a position to write a thesis at all; it remains to say that any merit which it might have is a result of the co-operation of all these people, and that its faults are my own.

I.

PROLOGUE : PREDECESSORS.

"England a nest of singing  
birds"  
(Polite Essays).

In 1908 Ezra Pound arrived in London, fresh from an extended visit to Europe, during which his first book of poetry had been published: A Lume Spento, which caused no upheaval in the world of contemporary letters at all, one of the reasons being that a mere one hundred copies were printed and released, most of them finding their way to friends of the author as presentations.

He came to England with the avowed intention of learning the art of writing poetry from William Butler Yeats, believing that no-one then living knew more about it. The idea of visiting Swinburne also attracted him, but in this case his efforts to meet the ageing poet were unsuccessful -

"Swinburne my only miss  
and I didn't know he'd been to see Landor  
and they told me this that and t'other  
and when old Matthews went he saw the three teacups  
two for Watts-Dunton who liked to let his tea cool..  
But given what I know now I'd have  
got through it somehow ..... " 1.

From the published reminiscences of some of those who knew him in the early days it would seem that the 23 year-old Pound earned a good deal of dislike in literary London. Wyndham Lewis has said that it was apparent that Pound simply wished to impress, that he desired "to prove.....that he was superior to all other intellectuals in intellect, and all poets in prosodic prowess." 2.

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1. Canto LXXXII.

2. "Ezra Pound" by Wyndham Lewis: Ezra Pound, ed. P. Russell, London, Peter Nevill, 1950. p.258.

Pound had studied comparative European literature from 1901 to 1907, "with the definite intention of finding out what had been written, and how. The motives (he) presumed to differ with the individual writers." <sup>3</sup>

The architectonics of his poems were based on the forms used by the twelfth-century troubadours, who had constituted the main part of his examination. Whatever his desires might have been, the poetry which he wrote in 1908 and 1909 (appearing in A Quinzaine For This Yule and in Personae) certainly does not show any startling superiority in prosodic capability or in treatment of language when compared to contemporary English verse, a brief panoramic view of which it is necessary to take before attempting to evaluate any further the merits which Pound's work did have.

Poetry is by its very nature most susceptible to any change in the current intellectual climate, but it is also true that Tradition has an enormously strong influence upon any artistic mode of expression; and Edwardian poetry shows this very well. Yeats, in his introduction to the Oxford Book of Modern Verse, recognised the first aspect of this truism when he said

"Then in 1900 everybody got down off his stilts; henceforth nobody drank absinthe with his black coffee; nobody went mad; nobody committed suicide; nobody joined the Catholic church...Victorianism had been defeated."

For approximately thirty years before the turn of the century English poetry had existed under the influence of French aestheticism, which in its turn became decadence. Baudelaire's 'professionalism' and Gautier's famous slogan had been brought before the shocked eyes of the

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3. "Date Line" : Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T.S. Eliot, London, Faber & Faber, 1954, pp.77-8. Reprinted from Make It New, Ezra Pound, London, Faber & Faber, 1934.

more literate British public in Swinburne's Poems and Ballads of 1866. Les Fleurs Du Mal and Huysmans' A Rebours, Verlaine's decadence - their influence was apparent in Pater's secluded aestheticism, in George Moore's revolt in The Confessions of A Young Man, in Wilde's The Picture of Dorian Gray, and in Whistler's idea of the place of the artist in society. According to these men, choice of subject was immaterial, moral purpose in a work of art hampering, and the relation of art to life irrelevant. Each was in some way 'un homme pour qui le monde visible existe': the sensory world with its colours and forms and emotions and impressions was there for the artist to transmute into a masterpiece, no matter whom he pleased or elevated or disgusted in the process.

In England this theory, in the face of stolidly respectable middle-class society, turned the artist into a sort of outcast. He cultivated a certain 'nostalgie de la boue': this was at times developed into a positive rejection of the material comforts which society had to offer - as in the case of James Thomson, George Gissing and Francis Thompson. These men were the forerunners of the Rhymers' Club, whose members used to meet at the Cheshire Cheese in London and who contributed to the Yellow Book and to The Savoy. The Rhymers - Yeats, Dowson, Symons, Lionel Johnson, Davidson, Le Gallienne and others, banished the world and its social crises and were in turn banished:

"...orgueilleux et doux loin des vacarmes  
De la vie et du choc désordonné des armes  
Mercenaires, voyez, gravissant les hauteurs  
Ineffables, voici le groupe des Chanteurs  
Vêtus de blanc...  
Le monde, que troublait leur parole profonde  
Les exile. À leur tour ils exilent le monde!" 4.

These were the men who drank absinthe with their coffee and who joined the Catholic church. They followed

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4. Paul Verlaine: Prologue, Poèmes Saturniens.

Mallarmé in trying to purify language, but succeeded in establishing a 'celtic twilight' speech of exquisite and delicate symbolism. Yeats was the only one of them who, in John Davidson's phrase, had the 'blood and guts' to make the change - and he did this with the help of Pound.

The remnants of the aesthetic and decadent movements were minor poets: Lord Alfred Douglas, Stephen Phillips and Richard Middleton. Douglas' poetry shows a lack of ability to fuse form and content, together with an interest in words which overrode that in the idea to be communicated. Phillips received fulsome praise for his Marlovian blank verse; a not-so-mighty line, sometimes effective, but marked with the stamp of decadence: lilies, wine, music with a dying fall, and the scent of roses. Middleton, "the carolling boy of English poetry", diluted the Parnassian delight and excitement in the untrammelled exercise of the senses into a pointless personal hedonism expressed in mushy language:

".....here let me lie,  
In the ashes and the dust,  
Dreaming, dreaming pleasantly...  
Song and laughter, food and wine,  
Roses, roses red and white,  
And a star or two to shine  
On my dewy world at night....."

He may fairly be described as the fag-end of the movement.

Verlaine may be quoted again to advantage in treating of the other main stream of influence in the English poetry of the time:

"Aujourd'hui, l'Action et le Rêve ont brisé  
Le pacte primitif par les siècles usé,  
Et plusieurs ont trouvé funeste ce divorce  
De l'Harmonie immense et bleue et de la Force..."

A similar dichotomy between poetry of action and of dream grew in England. If one may be allowed to append the label of 'dream' to the poetry just described, one may with justification call the Tennyson-Browning-Arnold line that of action. Tennyson vaguely attempted to integrate the position of the poet in society with contemporary

scientific discoveries; Browning indicated his breezy acceptance of the contemporary world and his uneasy desire not to take too close a look at it by his interest in the characters of strange times and strange places; and Arnold indirectly but convincingly showed his acceptance by giving up the writing of verse and becoming an inspector of schools.

In the same tradition there is Ruskin's fierce insistence that art is intimately involved with current social questions - possibly a laudable attitude, but one which when carried to the extreme of Fors Clavigera and St. George's Guild tends to lose its weight in the face of widespread amusement. Oscar Wilde may be included among the poets of action, for under the journalism, the shallow aestheticism, the veneer of hedonism-as-philosophy-of-art there was a perception of the need for social reform: he brought this into works like "De Profundis" and "The Ballad of Reading Gaol", and into essays such as that on "The Soul of Man Under Socialism". His language became more colloquial and less decorative; like Yeats, he improved with age and experience.

Wilfred Scawen Blunt and Ernest Henley were two poets who carried on the idea of action. The latter experimented with a form of vers libre, and used something approaching everyday speech in his most important work - he is a forerunner of the Eliot of the "Preludes" with his impressionist evocation of atmosphere and mood in the sequence "In Hospital". Unfortunately this represents a minor portion of his output, the rest of which is an Untermeyerian anthologist's happy hunting-ground with sloppily written, watered-down Kiplingese like the well-worn "Invictus" and "England, My England". Blunt in his early efforts produced poetry notable for its Byronic zest: his sonnet-sequence "To Esther" has

an association of sensibility similar to that of the better Metaphysical poets. The "Seven Golden Odes of Arabia" are interesting from a prosodic viewpoint: they introduce a line based on the rhythmic and melodic effect of Arabian poetry, but are marred by their overluxurious verbiage.

Hardy, who took to the publication of verse comparatively late in life, explored many of the outstanding questions of the 'modern crisis'. He treated Imperialism with greater sensitivity than did Kipling, but is most remarkable for his ironical pessimism. He was concerned with verse-as-speech, and his poetry is outstanding for its clarity and concision in an age characterised by its love of ornament. It was undoubtedly this quality which led Pound to admire him, as well as his perception of the meaning of "Homage to Sextus Propertius" when most classical scholars were gleefully denouncing its author as a charlatan and an ignoramus.

Housman's pessimism was similar to that of Hardy - produced perhaps by a deep distrust of the contemporary social framework. His work is usually called strictly classical; it certainly depends for much of its (questionable) effect upon its author's dedicated adherence to metrical regularity. It is not unjust to say that the inanity of what Housman was saying is equalled only by the monotony of his thumping iambs.

Masefield was and is a versifier, and has never been a poet. A possible merit of his writing is that it is sometimes straightforward and uses a language approximating to that of everyday speech. Bridges, who saw Victorianism rise to flower and fall to decay, let his poetry take second place behind his scholarly interest in prosody. Kipling, the great Panjandrum of the school of action, accomplished something in the way of the

Dorset-dialect poetry of Barnes and the Manx-slang overtones of that of T.E. Brown, one of the modern patron-saints of the Isle of Man: he sentimentalised and established the popular ballad and the common speech of the people about whom it was not considered the thing to write poetry. Occasionally his patriotic persona slipped, and a delicately lyrical, completely unsuspected Kipling is revealed, as in some of his early songs. Again there is occasionally a glimpse of the Browningesque dramatic monologue, as in "McAndrew's Hymn". However it is as a balladeer that Kipling will be remembered, and his importance lies not in any technical innovations which he might have made - he did not - but in his choice of subjects previously thought outside the canon.

In 1908, therefore, the general opinion of the educated middle-class, the "battalions of suburbia", was that poetry had to be pleasant and dignified, easy to understand and of unquestionable morals. Tennyson, Browning and Arnold were regarded as the arbiters of excellence. Decadence, and the concept of the artist as being aloof from the common herd seemed to be on the wane; the trial of Wilde had initiated the collapse of the romanticisation of sin and the weirdly evil drawings of the Yellow Book coterie. The middle-class, 'comfortable' in financial matters, was removed from any direct contact with poverty: its members sat at ease in an atmosphere of moderately well-bred conservative Imperialism with Kipling as the voice of current idealism - although his strident patriotism had lost favour in certain quarters during the Boer War, and was continuing to do so. Heartiness was becoming increasingly fashionable - poets drank beer, carried stout ashplants and sang of the beauties of rural England. Typical of the theories of

poetry of the time, and indirectly indicative of the 'literary-chat' type of criticism then prevalent, is the following statement made by Sir Edward Marsh in 1939, referring to the period in question:

"I like poetry to be all three (or if not all three, at least two; or if the worst came to the worst at least one) of the following things: intelligible, musical and racy, and I was happier with it if it was written on some formal principle which I could discern, and from which it departed, if at all, only for the sake of some special effect, and not because the lazy or impetuous writer found observance difficult or irksome. I liked poetry that I wanted to know by heart, and could learn by heart if I had time."

What has been mistakenly named the "Georgian Revolt" was imminent; that slow decline of English traditional romantic poetry which continued until the Great War. The stage was set for the entrance of the latest foreign revitalising force. This time it came not from the cafés and garrets of Paris, but from Hailey, Idaho, by way of 12th century Provence, the Pre-Raphaelites and Browning - Ezra Pound.

II.

INFLUENCES: VEALISH YEARS.

"And many a one hath sung his  
songs  
More craftily, more subtle-  
souled than I."

("And Thus in Nineveh")

THE fact that the revitalisation was not clearly apparent in Personae and Exultations did not prevent the recognition of the two volumes by the literary critics of the day. Pound's verse was accepted as something new and interesting; he was sufficiently satisfied by its reception to mention in a letter to William Carlos Williams that he was "suddenly somewhat of a success", that he had been praised by Yeats, that after eight years "hammering against impenetrable adamant" it now seemed that he was secure on the ladder to greatness. This satisfaction may be attributed to youthful pride, as it is paradoxical in the extreme when considered in the light of his contemporary statements about the criticism upon whose judgment he was building his hopes.

Time and again Pound inveighed against the 'literary bureaucracy' which had caused his voluntary exile from America and which he had again encountered when he came to England; in his opinion it continued to hold power in both countries until the frequent attacks of the members of his clique induced a few bolder spirits in the magazines and publishing houses to notice new work. In the period 1902 - 1909 James Douglas in the Star was lionizing Stephen Phillips as "the greatest poetic dramatist...since Elizabethan times"; in Ireland

"...le public rustre et les provinciaux de Dublin étaient alors en train de manifester contre les drames de Synge, les trouvant un attentat à la dignité nationale..."

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1. "James Joyce et Pécuchet". Polite Essays: Ezra Pound. London, Faber & Faber, 1937, p.94. Reprinted from Mercure de France, 1er Juin, 1922.

England was "a country in love with amateurs", and

"One of the densest, almost ubiquitous, English stupidities of (the) time was the disbelief that poetry was an art. Dozens of blockheads expected the crystal Helicon to gush from their addled occiputs 'scientiae immunes...anseris naturali'." 2

As far as editors were concerned, those

"...who are not by nature and inclination essentially base, do, by any continuing practice of their trade become so. That is to say the system of... publication is at bottom opposed to the aims of the serious artist in letters." 3

the point being, as Pound pointed out, that the editors wanted verse which would "fit the scheme of their number." Marsh's criteria quoted in the last chapter indicate the general trend of thought that the poet should at best be a craftsman working along traditional lines - the composition of poetry was a pastime for the leisured, and innovation was discouraged because it might interfere with the ease with which the connoisseur obtained pleasant sensations from the volume he had just bought. It was a critical attitude which did not prevent the appearance of mediocre minor poetry, but which precluded any new explorations of reality and any real advance in technique. English and American criticism was engaged in the relatively useless assertion that what was in the tradition was good, without looking for what might be refreshingly new. One of the reasons for the acclaim accorded Pound's early work was that it showed to a marked degree the influence of the 'Nineties; it was safely in tradition, it had the attractive romantic tang which characterised Yeats' celtic twilight period; above all, perhaps, the emotional attitudes of the writers whom Pound had read in College - Dowson, Fiona McLeod, Browning and Swinburne - pervaded his books.

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2. Ibid. "Harold Monro" Reprinted from The Criterion, July 1932, p.7.

3. Patria Mia: Ezra Pound. Chicago, Ralph Fletcher Seymour, 1950. (Originally intended for publication 1913) p.39.

The first poem in the 1909 Personae is an example of Pound's writing in a style so foreign to that later associated with him that the reader acquainted with a broad view of his work finds it hard to believe that it was written seriously. It is short enough to quote entire:

GRACE BEFORE SONG

Lord God of heaven that with mercy dight  
Th'alternate prayer-wheel of the night and light  
Eternal hath to thee, and in whose sight  
Our days as rain drops in the sea surge fall,

As bright white drops upon a leaden sea  
Grant so my songs to this grey folk may be:

As drops that dream and gleam and falling catch  
the sun,

Evan'scent mirrors every opal one  
Of such his splendour as their compass is,  
So, bold My Songs, seek ye such death as this.

The poet has been so concerned with the preservation of the heavily-accented rhythm that he has unforgivably assaulted 'evanescent', making it unpronounceable; the triple rhyme in the first stanza demands a hefty swat on the ultimate syllable in each of the first three lines, making the sense of the verse practically impenetrable; archaisms numerous enough to delight the most dedicated mediaevalist abound (Bridges, on reading Personae, was heard to mutter gleefully "We'll get 'em all back"); and adjectives inserted merely for the sake of an internal rhyme or for colourful decoration stick out like sore thumbs.

"Ballad for Gloom" is a self-conscious piece of bravado reminiscent of Henley's "Invictus" and Kipling's "If". Written in the style of the latter's popular ballads and with an adolescent sensitivity, it also has its inversions and archaisms:

"For God, our God, is a gallant foe  
that playeth behind the veil,  
Whom God deigns not to overthrow  
hath need of triple mail."

An example of the Miltonic language which Pound was later to condemn may be found in "Occidit". There is also a

noticeable striving after a neo-Swinburnian sort of word-music:

"Autumnal breaks the flame upon the sun-set herds.  
The sheep on Gilead as tawn hair gleam  
Neath Mithra's dower and his slow departing,  
While in the sky a thousand fleece of gold  
Bear, each his tribute, to the waning god."

The latinate diction is more apparent in the second stanza, as is the influence of Morris upon the imagery:

"Hung on the rafters of the effulgent west,  
Their tufted splendour shields his decadence,  
As in our southern lands brave tapestries  
Are hung king-greeting from the ponticells..."

There is nothing in this poem to show that 'searching for the mot juste' which Ford Madox Hueffer had been trying to drum into Pound's head ever since their meeting. What it does show is the tight grip which the seventeenth century had upon the language of English verse, a fact which Pound was later to bewail in prose and try to rectify in poetry. On the basis of "Occidit" one would never dream of the existence of Gautier and Mallarmé. The precision which they introduced into poetry, and that which Flaubert brought into prose, was to give Pound one of his main platforms for argument on the technique of verse when he had learned enough to form a style of his own; the lack of it had prompted Stendhal to write that

"La poésie, avec ses comparaisons obligées, sa mythologie que ne croit pas le poète, sa dignité de style à la Louis XIV, et tout l'attirail de ses ornements appelés poétiques, est bien au-dessous de la prose dès qu'il s'agit de donner une idée claire et précise des mouvements du coeur; or, dans ce genre, on n'émeut que par la clarté."

This attack may with perfect justice be levelled at the greater part of Personae and Exultations: it is for the most part mere fustian and bad pastiche. There is little efficiency about the work; one sees the poet using various models and setting his exercises before the public.

Seemingly the only French poet whose writing Pound had up to this stage studied, Villon too came in for his share of imitation in the early volumes.

The "Villonauds" were written, Pound wrote to a friend, in what he conceived "after a good deal of study to be an expression akin to, if not of, the spirit breathed in Villon's own poeting." This 'spirit' one takes to mean the way Villon presented his emotions starkly and gauntly, without artificiality; "he paints himself, as Rembrandt painted his own hideous face"; his poems are not tainted with fancy; they present the feelings, the life he knew with no illusions. Pound's 'Villonauds' attempt to recapture the defiance of some of the Villon sirventes; they have a little of the zest of the original, but they are so stuffed with archaic phrases and inversions that the syntax suffers. One can only assume that he used them to give an atmosphere of age - in the same way that Spenser dug them out of Chaucer to give a mediaeval flavour to his "Shepheardes Calendar". The unfortunate result is obscure sense and a feeling that the finished poem is patchy:

"Towards the Noel that morte saison  
(Christ make the shepherds' homage dear!)  
Then when the grey wolves everychone  
Drink of the winds their chill small-beer  
And lap o' the snows food's gueredon  
Then makyth my heart his yule-tide cheer  
(Skoal! with the dregs if the clear be gone!)  
Wincing the ghosts of yesteryear."

This is little more than third-rate macaronic verse. Moreover, as may be seen, Pound has taken the theme from "Les Neiges d'Antan" and reworked it himself - to the infinite gain of the original.

In 1908 Pound had set out a few rules which he intended to follow on his way to the "ultimate attainments of poesy". They were

- "1. To paint the thing as I see it.
2. Beauty.
3. Freedom from didacticism.
4. It is only good manners of you repeat a few other men to at least do it better or more briefly. Utter originality is of course out of the question."

4

Harmless enough, and superficial enough. He showed in the 'Villonauds' that as far as the fourth rule was concerned he had not yet obtained the experience necessary to rival previous masters whom he wished to imitate; they are closer to Swinburne's and Rossetti's translations than to the actual spirit of Villon.

The most successful poems in Personae, the ones which pointed to the path along which Pound was to find his own style, were those which showed most clearly the mark of his Romance Literature studies. In comparison with the other poems making up the volume, they have a colour and a technical skill which is unusual.

Edith Sitwell has, in her inimitable and somewhat astonishing way, indicated the merit of "Na Audiart". This is a direct attempt to follow the form of the Provençal canzon. Pound includes the razo, the introductory prose paragraph, the function of which was to tell the listeners something of the man who had made the song - the trobar, or finder; he has used alliteration and a type of free verse which is not as formal as that used by the troubadours; and he has used an irregular rhyme-scheme whereas in Provençal canzone the rhyme conforms to strict patterns; but nevertheless the poem has a colour and music about it which one would find difficult to match in the centuries since the Elizabethan songbooks.

Miss Sitwell predictably finds the poems in Personae "exquisitely balanced", and having the "pure melodic line which is only to be found in the greatest lyric poetry". She enthuses and gushes. One wonders whether she is indulging in some veiled adverse criticism when she describes this line

"...sometimes pausing and sinking - as a fountain pauses and sinks before springing afresh - sometimes growing like a flower."

5



that restatement something of a surprise. The fact is that "Na Audiart" is wholly musical; it has its own word-music, and by virtue of its cadence it seems to have some half-heard accompaniment; it is, after all, a minstrel's song.

"Marvoil" is another canzon. It is notable for its language - colloquial and direct, in the sequence of everyday speech and with its cadence. Similarly "Cino" impresses when compared with the rest of the poems in the book: its banality is forgotten when one realises that Pound has here used direct speech as verse even more successfully than in "Na Audiart":

'Cino?' 'Oh, eh, Cino Polnesi  
The singer is't you mean?'  
'Ah yes, passed once our way,  
A saucy fellow, but....  
(Oh they are all one these vagabonds),  
Peste! 'tis his own songs?  
Or some other's that he sings?  
But you, My Lord, how with your city?"

The slight bookishness of the language of "Na Audiart" is absent. The influence of Browning's dramatic monologues is also apparent in the last two poems examined; in "Marvoil" there is a typical passage:

"The Vicomte of Beziers 's not such a bad lot.  
I made rimes to his lady this three year:  
Vers and canzone, till that damn'd son of Aragon,  
Alfonso the half-bald, took to hanging  
His helmet at Beziers."

and the Browningsque touch is obvious in the passage from "Cino" quoted above, as it is in the first quotation from "Na Audiart" - "Just a word in thy praise, girl,". Later Pound was to acknowledge his debt to Browning in a long letter to the French critic René Taupin, but at the time he said of his own dramatic lyrics

"To me the short so-called dramatic lyric - at any rate the sort of thing I do - is the poetic part of a drama the rest of which (to me the prose part) is left to the reader's imagination or implied or set in a short note. I catch the character I happen to be interested in at the moment he interests

usually a moment of song, self-analysis, or sudden understanding or revelation. And the rest of the play would bore me and presumably the reader."

6

In contrast to the more successful Provençal type poem there is an example of the canzon being mixed with early-Yeats, celtic-revival diction and attitude in "La Fraiscne". The first stanza is pure Yeats:

"For I was a gaunt, grave councillor  
Being in all things wise, and very old,  
But I have put aside this folly and the cold  
That old age weareth for a cloak..."

Pound found it necessary to append a 'prefatory note' at the end of the volume to explain the symbolism. In irritatingly ponderous prose he said

"Also has Mr. Yeats in his 'Celtic Twilight' treated of such, and I because in such a mood, feeling myself divided between myself corporeal and a self aetherial...."

The poem itself hardly gains; it is divided between trying to be Provençal and trying to be Yeats, and it is no use Pound's continuing in the note that "low, slowly he speaketh it, as one drawn apart, reflecting (égaré)", for the poem is, in large parts, simply bad prose:

".....I have thrown  
All folly from me, putting it aside  
To leave the old barren ways of men,  
Because my bride  
Is a pool of the wood, and  
Though all men say that I am mad  
It is only that I am glad....."

This is bad art. It gives the impression that the lines were chopped from a chunk of mediocre Oirish legend and arbitrarily arranged into a weak attempt at vers libre. It was written while he was still at College, and he would have done better to have omitted it from the volume.

Exultations contained a larger number of Provençal poems than did Personae, but they do not show any advance in technique. The inversions remain,

together with a characteristic romantic colourwash which is a legacy from Pound's predecessors. In "Aux Belles De Londres" there are examples of purely 'literary' phrases and a dated world-weariness more suitable in the conversations of the 'intense' ladies of passionate Brompton at the turn of the century, than in the expressions of a twenty-four year old poet in 1909. On the other hand the rhythm is free from the rhetorical booming found passim in Personae and has some musical overtones, although it drags slightly. The merit of the poem lies in diction, although that is slightly bookish and affected when put to the test:

"I am aweary with the utter and beautiful weariness  
And with the ultimate wisdom and with things terrene,  
I am aweary with your smiles and your laughter,  
And the sun and the winds again  
Reclaim their booty and the heart o' me."

The feeling is that of Flecker's "The True Paradise", and is too personal to succeed. The horrible phrase which closes the poem seems to have been a favourite of the poet; more than the repeated 'aweary' it has that stilted, romantic (in the pejorative sense) flavour which taints the whole.

In "Laudantes Decem Pulchritudinis Johanae Templi" Pound descends to slop, incantation, bathos, adjectival superfluity and imitation of a style which fails to gain anything at all in being wrested from its proper place. The poem simply shows how slavishly it was possible for a young poet to crib from Yeats:

"When it first comes, and the glamour that rests  
On the little streams in the evening; all of these  
Call me to her, and all the loveliness in the world  
Binds me to my beloved with strong chains of gold."

Pound would never have written 'all the loveliness in the world' three or four years later. It is a meaningless phrase belonging to the effusions of someone like Richard Le Gallienne - pretty, charming, romantic and blurred.

He copies Yeats in giving individual stanzas subtitles in the third person, a practice which is acceptable when encountered in the work of a poet able to carry the trick off well, but which is unforgivable when badly done by an apprentice hand: "He speaks to the rain", and "He speaks to the moonlight concerning her" belong with the poetry of romantic Ireland, and it was stupid of Pound to imagine that he could rival Yeats in this sphere; as far as he was concerned, romantic Ireland, if not dead and gone, was at least far beyond his reach. There is Yeats' own delight in adjectives of pure colour - white foam, green waves, purple cups, red leaves; and the crowning piece of presumption occurs in the second stanza:

"I am torn, torn with thy beauty,  
O Rose of the sharpest thorn!  
O Rose of the crimson beauty  
Why hast thou awakened the sleeper?  
Why hast thou awakened the heart within me,  
O Rose of the crimson thorn?"

It is permissible for one poet to make use of the language and symbolism of another, but as Pound himself said, "it is only good manners to...do it better or more briefly." In this poem he violates both 'good manners' and good taste.

He copies Yeats' mannerisms again in "Planh of White Thoughts he saw in a Forest". Here the cadence is more tightly woven than before, but the Yeatsian keening in the face of unrequited love is out of place, as is the recurrence of 'popular Irish' inversion:

".....When I see them a-hiding  
And a-passing out and in through the shadows  
- And it is white they are - "

and

"But if one should look at me with the old hunger  
in her eyes,  
How will I be answering her eyes?"

and

"Aye! It's a long hunting  
And it's a deep hunger I have when I see them  
a-gliding  
And a-flickering there, where the trees stand apart."

Another master whom Pound follows in this volume is Heine, and the "Translations and Adaptations" are among the most successful of his writings prior to 1912. Pure verse-as-speech is the hallmark of the nine poems which make up the sequence, and they are significant for another reason - Pound learned from them a little of the art of fine satire which he was to bring to the poems in *Lustra* seven years later. Inversions are conspicuous by their absence, and the occasional archaisms are so skilfully incorporated into the whole that they do not in the least disturb the major form. The poems move, they have a life of their own:

"O ye lips that are ungrateful  
Hath it never once distressed you  
That you can say such awful things  
Of anyone who ever kissed you?"

and delightfully in

"The mutilated choir boys  
When I begin to sing  
Complain about the awful noise  
And call my voice too thick a thing...

They sing of Love that's grown desirous,  
Of Love, and joy that is Love's inmost part,  
And all the ladies swim through tears  
Toward such a work of art."

One omits regretfully the jibe at Housman - "O woe, woe, woe, etcetera" - for perhaps the most ambitious poem in the volume: "Sestina: Altaforte", a reconstruction of the character of one of Pound's favourite troubadours, Bertrams de Born. It is a dramatic monologue, and the inversions are there again along with the familiar archaisms, but here, as in the Heine sequence, they are woven into the form with great skill, and give it an authentic atmosphere which is lacking in most of the Provençal poems, except perhaps "Audiart" and "Cino".

To compare this sestina with Swinburne's is to realise just how far Pound had progressed in the craft of prosody - a progress which one cannot be censured for missing when one considers the rest of his early poetry. The later mastery manifests itself in the strikingly skilful adherence to the intricate, formal rhyme-scheme; in contrast, Swinburne seems forced and shoddy. There is a vitality about the work, springing from the boisterous bombast of the language - bombast which is never overdone. Any quotation loses by being ripped from its matrix, but the sixth stanza gives a good idea of the free-running speech, the bounding rhythm and the enormous zest of it all:

"Papiols, Papiols, to the music!  
There's no sound like to swords swords opposing,  
No cry like the battle's rejoicing  
When our elbows and swords drip the crimson  
And our charges 'gainst 'The Leopard's' rush clash.  
May God damn forever all who cry 'Peace!'"

It is not easy to think of any other poem of the period which forecasts Pound's genius as clearly as this completely successful attempt at an extremely exacting form.

One might say that in Personae and Exultations Pound was presenting his notebooks to the public. An overall view of the poetry in the two volumes gives the picture of a patchwork quilt; some of the squares are delicately and finely executed, but for the most part they are luridly coloured, ragged at the edges, and made with other peoples' wool. Pound's verse was at this time just beginning to take direction, and the influences through which he was having such a hard time in working, for all their immediately amateurish manifestations, had some positively good results; he was learning the importance of verse as speech and as song, and he was well on the way to breaking the rule of the pentameter.

As has been shown, this period in his poetic development was one of subjection to masters of the art. He was continually seeking out those poets who had made some new contribution to the technique of verse-writing, and he was unhappy until he had satisfied himself that he had assimilated all that they had to show, and could equal or excel them at their own game. He would at this stage have appreciated Yeats' "The Fascination of What's Difficult"; the trouble he experienced in trying to overcome the intricacies of the styles he chose as models is clear. Moreover, his verse- and rhythm-making skill was at this time not the only aspect of the craft which was benefiting by his labours; his language was slowly being perfected, his control over it becoming more and more complete, by reason of his painstaking experiment and imitation.

In 1910 Pound's first prose book was published. It is well defined by its subtitle: The Spirit of Romance; an attempt to define somewhat the charm of the pre-renaissance literature in Europe. It is less of a book of criticism than a manual of comparative literature, dealing with "such mediaeval works as still possess an interest other than archaeological for the contemporary reader who is not a specialist." In the preface Pound insists that he has not presented mere opinion, but has rather selected various texts and has implied his criticism in this way. Chapters range from "Psychology and Troubadours" to one showing why Dante referred to Arnaut Daniel as 'il miglior fabbro'; from a perceptive presentation of Villon to a discussion of romanticism and classicism in Latin verse of the time of Apuleius; from an assessment of the quality of the poetry of Lope de Vega to an admirably clear essay on mediaeval geste and romance.

Comparative Literature as a study in itself was in 1910 a relatively rare thing; it was taught in German Universities and almost nowhere else. Pound insisted and still insists on its necessity to the aspiring poet; only in this way can he find and examine those "forces, elements or qualities which were potent in the mediaeval literature of the Latin tongues and are ...still potent in our own." One may contrast the view of Dr. Leavis and his school, who consider that the 'tradition' of the poetry of any one language is sufficient to give a good grounding - precluding at once any idea that the influence of foreign movements or schools is of any importance at all. Pound has spent most of his life insisting that a knowledge of the literatures of other countries is essential to the man of letters, and happily educators are inclining to this view.

The fact that the "forces, elements or qualities" had been cloaked by years of unquestioning adherence to traditional rules of prosody and poetic diction made their potency latent, and Pound undertook to make it real. He pointed out that

"The history of an art is the history of masterwork, not of failures, or mediocrity. The omniscient historian would display the masterpieces, their causes and their inter-relation. The study of literature is hero-worship."

7

Elsewhere he has said that he considers the 'evil' done by Sainte-Beuve to be 'incalculable', referring to the latter's well-known belief that literature is the expression of personality, and the consequent industry of the scholars in picking through wash-lists and genealogies instead of looking at the text. In "The Spirit of Romance" Pound sets the text before the reader,

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7. The Spirit of Romance, Ezra Pound. London, Peter Owen, 1952. p.7. Revised ed. (Original ed. 1910.

as much of it as he can; often it is given in the original Provençal, Latin, Italian or Portuguese, and frequently it is accompanied by a careful translation, preserving as faithfully as possible the faults as well as the virtues of the original. He had in 1910 not yet formed that virulent hatred of "morphology, epigraphy, privatleben and the kindred delights of the archaeological or 'scholarly' mind" which was to colour his later criticism; here he was young enough to say that he considered it quite as justifiable that a man should wish to study

"...the poetry and nothing but the poetry of a certain period, as that he should study its antiquities, phonetics, or paleography and be, at the end of his labours, incapable of discerning a refinement of style or a banality of diction." 8.

He points out in a ponderous metaphor that art is not unlike a river, in that it is at times disturbed by the quality of the river bed, but is independent of that bed in a way, and that the colour of the water depends upon the substance of the bed and banks. "Stationary objects are reflected, but the quality of motion is of the river." The artist is concerned with that which flows, and it is the business of the scientist to determine the significance of the rest.

From one standpoint The Spirit of Romance is a justification in prose of the heterogeneity of its author's poetic juvenilia. It explains indirectly his selection of the Troubadours as models; its obvious learning indicates how much Pound had yet to assimilate, how much practice he needed, in his chosen craft:

"The true poet is most easily distinguished from the false, when he trusts himself to the simplest expression, and when he writes without adjectives." 9

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8. Ibid.

9. Op. cit. p.208.

Meaning, of course, the "decorative frill adjective". He had yet to attain this standard in his poetry. He was learning how to do so from Ford Madox Hueffer, but it was a long process, and one which was to receive a welcome catalyst in Ernest Fenollosa's "Essay on the Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry" a few years later. He was learning more about rhythm too, mostly from the Provençal songs which he was translating; and the gradual refinement of his diction, the beginning of which is to be seen in Personae and Exultations, is indirectly explained in the following passage from an essay on Daniel:

"Daniel is also to be praised because, through his most complex and difficult forms the words run often with an unperturbed order, almost that of prose."

10

The 'prose tradition in verse': this theory acted as a refining agent in his struggle to break free from the tentacles of Victorian poetic diction.

The book is full of quotable passages, but perhaps the most important occurs in the first chapter. It is an attempt to define poetry, and shows in a nutshell Pound's whole conception of the function of the art. It is possible to draw from it some correlation with the idea of the 'persona', the poem-as-attitude, and even with his later theories of the objective reality of the poem, of its non-discursive existence qua poem:

"Poetry is a sort of inspired mathematics, which gives us equations, not for abstract figures, triangles, spheres and the like, but equations for the human emotions."

III.

RE-ASSESSMENT : OLE T.E.H. AND FORDIE.

"...a raid on the inarticulate  
With shabby equipment always  
deteriorating  
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,  
Undisciplined squads of emotion"  
("East Coker").

In 1908 the Women's Printing Society, Ltd., of London published a booklet of poems entitled "For Christmas MDCCCXVIII". Among the poems printed was the following piece by the British philosopher T.E. Hulme:

AUTUMN.

"A touch of cold in the Autumn night -  
I walked abroad,  
And saw the ruddy moon lean over a hedge  
Like a red-faced farmer.  
I did not stop to speak, but nodded,  
And round about were the wistful stars  
With white faces like town children."

Hulme had been sent down from Cambridge in 1904 and had spent the next two years studying in London as the fancy took him. In 1906 he had gone to Canada for three months, and in 1907 he spent seven months teaching English in Brussels. Here he had come into contact with modern French poets and their theories. On his return to London he delivered a lecture on modern poetry, later to be collected by Herbert Read in his True Voice of Feeling.

In the lecture Hulme set out from the premise that the age demanded a new verse form. He pointed out that in the arts the search is rather for the maximum of individual and personal expression, than for the attainment of any absolute beauty. Modern verse no longer dealt with heroic action; it had become definitely and finally introspective, and was concerned with the expression and communication of "momentary phases in the poet's mind". The new form, he said, was the "vers libre" practised by the French writers.

It consisted of a denial of a regular number of syllables as the basis of versification. "The length of the line is long and short, oscillating with the images used by the poet; it follows the contours of his thoughts and is free rather than regular." Regular metre was, to this poetry, cramping and out of place. It introduced the heavy pattern of rhetorical verse into "the delicate pattern of images and colour" which was what the poets were trying to accomplish. This "evoking an image, fitting the rhythm to the idea", was a delicate and difficult art, but it was the only way to lift English poetry out of the Turkish bath of sentiment in which it had been lolling for so long.

"Autumn" shows how Hulme applied the tenets of Kahn and his followers to his own attempts at verse. The length of the lines varies with the images presented, but more interesting than the use of free verse is the idea of the image. There is little or no 'talk about' in "Autumn"; the images are evoked in phrases of comparative austerity and it is left to the reader to make the final assessment of the quality of the poet's emotion. The usual discursiveness - an example of which is the last line in Yeats' "Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven":

"...But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams."

is missing, and the effect is achieved through the mere presentation of juxtaposed images and the consequent unstated perception arising in the mind from their interaction. This technique was to form one of the bases of the movement which came to be known as Imagisme.

Hulme gathered about him a circle of men who were all influenced by the French symbolists. Symons' pioneering efforts in The Symbolist Movement in Poetry, which had such an effect on Yeats' work, was supplemented somewhat by one of the group, F.S. Flint, who wrote

appreciations of the symbolists for Harold Monro's magazine; Edward Storer advocated the use of the word-as-image; while Hulme himself demanded "absolutely accurate presentation and no verbiage". The group used to meet for dinner at the 'Tour Eiffel', and on April 22nd, a week before the appearance of Personae, Pound joined it. No evidence of the ideas with which he came into contact there is to be seen in Exultations or in Canzoni, which was published in 1911. Ripostes, which appeared in the next year, shows definite associations, and Pound indirectly emphasised this by appending the "Complete Poetical Works of T.E. Hulme" (five poems) to the volume.

Before examining the practical results of Imagisme on Pound's verse, it is necessary to look at the theoretical background of the movement, as it was formulated by Pound himself as well as by Hulme. Pound has insisted that Hulme had little if anything to do with the adoption of the principles of the Imagistes. (The word was anglicised later). In The Townsman of January 1938 he said, apropos of "this Hulme business", that "the critical LIGHT during the years immediately pre-war in London shone not from Hulme but from Ford (Madox etc.) in so far as it fell on writing at all." Hulme "stopped writing poetry... his evenings were diluted with crap like Bergson"; Ford, on the other hand, "knew about WRITING". In a letter to Michael Roberts written in 1937 he had said that the man who did the work for English writing was Ford. The "proportion of ole T.E.H. to London 1908 to 1910, '12, '14" was such that he was not "hated and loathed by the ole bastards, because they didn't know he was there."<sup>1</sup> Ford, meanwhile, was editing the English Review, and "the old crusted lice and advocates of corpse language"

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1. The Letters of Ezra Pound, ed. D.D. Paige. London, Faber & Faber, 1951. pp. 338-9.

knew that he was.

It would seem that Pound's memory has been obscured by the passage of time and by a certain confusion of terms. Ford - or Hueffer as he then was - was not trying to introduce any new concept of poetry as was Hulme. He was one of the few men in literary London who were at that time preaching the doctrine of the mot juste. His association with Conrad had forced him to realise that English prose suffered from a prolix verbosity, that the work of Flaubert was technically of a higher standard, that clear, concise observation was necessary. He fought against the 'literary' language which was rife in the poetry and prose of the day. It was the exact word and the 'prose tradition in verse' which he advocated. In the preface to his collected poems he made this clear:

"It is something a matter of diction. In France, on the whole, a poet - and even a quite literary poet - can write in a language that roughly speaking, any hatter can use. In Germany the poet writes exactly as he speaks." 2

When a boy at school he had read Swinburne, Tennyson, Pope and Browning, and consequently

"...seemed to get from them the idea that all poets must of necessity write affectedly, at great length, with many superfluous words." 3

He found in Flaubert's exact, non-discursive phrases the antidote to the stilted, artificial language of the time.

Hulme, it is conceded, did not publish any of his notes on the subject of accurate presentation and the theory of the image. But the notes exist, and it is certain that their substance formed the basis of his conversation at the 'Tour Eiffel'. He saw the Romantic poetry of the time as constituting a menace to true poetic expression, and demanded a new 'classicism' to combat this.

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2. "Collected Poems" Ford Madox Ford. London, Max Goschen, 1913. p.14.  
3. Ibid. p.22.

Owing to Pound's denial of Hulme's influence and the sycophantic reiteration of this attitude by most of his admirers who have written on the subject, it is necessary for the sake of balance to go fairly deeply into Hulme's theories of poetry; an objective view of the situation shows that the credit for working out the theories adopted by the Imagistes belongs to Hulme. In addition it will be indirectly seen that most of what Pound has written on the aesthetics of poetry, most of the essential ideas, are present in Hulme's "Notes on Language and Style" in Speculations. There is really nothing in the body of Ford's published work to suggest that he had thought with the same intensity about issues in poetry, or that he had formulated them, even in the fragmentary way that Hulme had. Ford's comprehensive and masterly introduction to the 1930 Imagist Anthology is no contradiction to this, as it was written post hoc to the poetry it describes.

Hulme starts off by maintaining that after a hundred years of romanticism a classical revival is about to take place. He defines romanticism as the view that man, the individual, is an infinite reservoir of possibilities, intrinsically good, and spoilt by mere circumstance. As an example he cites the first sentence of Rousseau's Social Contract: "Man is born free, and he finds himself everywhere in chains." Classicism is the exact opposite to this: Man is a fixed and limited animal whose nature is absolutely constant, bound by order and tradition to something "fairly decent". Moving into the realm of metaphysics, he postulates the theory that appetite, belief in the deity, sex-instinct and so on are all normally fixed instincts. At certain times, for example by use of force or rhetoric, the latter two have been repressed - citing as examples

Florence and Savonarola, Geneva and Calvin, and England and the Roundheads. The result of the repression is that the instincts burst out into abnormalities.

Applying this to religion, he equates agnosticism with romanticism: "natural instincts are suppressed and you become an agnostic - you don't believe in a God, so you begin to believe man is a god. You don't believe in heaven, so you believe in a heaven on earth, i.e. romanticism." The concepts that are right and proper in their own sphere are "spread over, and so mess up, falsify and blur the clear outlines of human experience."<sup>4</sup>

Romantic and classical verse are the result of these two attitudes towards the cosmos, towards man, in so far as the result is reflected in literature.

"The romantic, because he thinks man infinite, must always be talking about the infinite: and as there is always the bitter contrast between what you think you ought to be able to do and what man can, it always tends, in its later stages at any rate, to be gloomy."<sup>5</sup>

The difference between classicism and romanticism is not merely one of restraint and exuberance:

"...even in the most imaginative flights" (of classical verse) "there is always a holding back, a reservation. The classical poet never forgets this finiteness, this limit of man... If you exceed the limits inside which you know man to be fastened, yet there is always... an impression of yourself standing outside it, and not quite believing it, or consciously putting it forward with a flourish... it is a question of pitch; in romantic verse you move at a certain pitch of rhetoric which you know... to be a little high-falutin."<sup>6</sup>

Discounting the prose style and the contradiction, it is possible to foresee the line Hulme's argument will take.

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4. Speculations, essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art. T.E.Hulme. ed. Herbert Read, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1924. p.118.

5. Op. cit. p.119.

6. Ibid. p.120.

His reason for the coming end of romanticism is that any particular convention or attitude in art has a definite span of life - it dies from exhaustion when all the possible tunes have been played on it; this has happened in the case of romanticism, and there will not be "any new efflorescence of verse until we get a new technique, a new convention, to turn ourselves loose in." He points out that for every kind of verse there is a corresponding receptive attitude. Although the romantic tradition has run dry, the critical attitude of mind demanding romantic qualities from verse still survives. Contemporary critics

"...cannot see that accurate description is a legitimate object of verse. Verse to them always means a bringing in of some of the emotions that are grouped around the word infinite... the dry hardness in the classics is repugnant to them." 7

With the mention of the 'dry hardness' of the classics Hulme's sweeping generalisations give way to observations which have an obvious link with Imagisme. He introduces the pre-Imagiste aesthetic with the statement that "it is essential to prove that beauty may be in small, dry things." Deciding that the great aim is accurate, precise and 'definite' definition he shows metaphorically that the artist is the man who rejects all approximations - with architect's curves it is possible to draw approximately any curve one wants; Hulme's artist would strike out the qualification and go for the exact curve. To attain this exactness it is necessary to avoid the use of conventional language. Hulme's theory of linguistics is somewhat deficient. He seems to consider it only in connection with the recording of images - which in verse "are not mere decoration, but the very essence of an intuitive language." Poetry is regarded as an essentially visual art, or rather, poetry, which consists in images, is a

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7. Ibid. p.126.

"compromise for a language of intuition which would hand over sensations bodily." Prose is discursive; it is a "counter language", using old, worn-out figures of speech; it "passes on to conclusions without thinking." He denies that language is logical. Phrases "have meaning for no reason" and the Idea is just as real as a landscape, and there "is the same difficulty in getting it onto paper.....there is the growing conviction of the solidity of ideas, as opposed to language." In fact, what Hulme wants for poetry is some magical process whereby images and sensations can be communicated straight from the poet's mind to that of the reader without any veil of language at all. Since this is impossible, what is required is some verbal equivalent of the physical phenomena to be represented; the rest - beauty, significance, metaphysical reverberations - is there, as Read says, "as an intrinsic grace."<sup>8</sup> Thought begins with the simultaneous presentation to the mind of two or more distinct but related images. Thus poetry is, and prose is simply a descriptive post-mortem. Plain speech, according to Hulme, is essentially inaccurate. It is only by new metaphors that it can be made precise:

"The highest verse, even though the subject be trivial, and the emotions of the intellect far away, is found when the 'fancy' is sincere in the accurate sense, when the whole of the analogy is necessary to get out the exact curve of the feeling or thing you want to express."<sup>9</sup>

Thus the fancy, or metaphor, must be exactly parallel to the thing described. When it has not sufficient connection with it, when it overlays it and there is a certain excess, then it is approaching the indirect

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8. The True Voice of Feeling. Herbert Read. London; Faber & Faber, 1953. p.115.  
9. Speculations. p.138.

language of prose. The poem must always endeavour "to arrest you, and to make you continuously see a physical thing, to prevent you gliding through an abstract process." The image appeals only to the mind, as opposed to the emotions; it is concrete, and utterly devoid of discursive meaning; it is the direct representation of what is intuited. In other words poetry is concerned solely with intuited truth, and has nothing to do with things explicable with reason.

It is clearly necessary to discover just what Hulme meant by the Image. It is "a flux of interpenetrated elements unseizable by the intellect." His entire theory of the Image is drawn from Bergson. The latter held that the human mind tends to analyse everything, to explain everything in a manner fitting the limitations of the human intellect; but obviously some things are 'known' but inexplicable in this manner. These things, Bergson would have it, are, while rationally inexplicable, nevertheless finite; they simply do not yield to discursive methods of analysis. They are of a different order of reality, accessible only to intuition; they are known to the poet - they are his Images, and because they are finite, they must be given with precision. When we live a feeling, we have an immediate knowledge of it. As soon as we try to put it into language to 'exteriorise' it, our means of expression fails us, and we have to use the bare Image to suggest it:

"Cet instrument, le mot...symbole social, utilitaire, conventionnel par excellence, est inapte à reproduire la vie intérieure. Le poète doit donc écarter ce système de symboles pour pouvoir pénétrer dans la pure durée, dans la confusion, dans l'interpénétration réciproque des états du moi profonde. Mais, si pour le musicien cette pénétration directe est possible grâce à la mélodie, le poète ne se passe pas

de langage, donc de symboles. Et comme le langage, le symbole, ne peut pas saisir directement la complexité vivante du moi profond, le poète se contente dans son art de la suggérer." 10

This symbolisation of the 'vie profonde' is made by the play of images, by new combinations of words which lose their conventional significance and give us the illusion of melody, the true image of the 'vie intérieure'. Hulme's theory of free verse - that the 'exact curve' is unobtainable when regular prefabricated rhythms are employed, and that the rhythms used must be fitted to the words and phrases, was perhaps suggested not only by Gustave Kahn's experiments but by Bergson's

"...pour nous induire à tenter le même effort sur nous-mêmes" (that of intuiting the 'état d'âme' of the poet) "ils s'ingénieront à nous faire voir quelque chose de ce qu'ils auront vu: par des arrangements rythmés de mots, qui arrivent ainsi à s'organiser ensemble et à s'animer d'une vie originale, ils nous disent, ou plutôt ils nous suggèrent, des choses que le langage n'était pas fait pour exprimer." 11

Thus it may be seen that Hulme was the first to bring into England the theory that the coherence of the poem need not necessarily be a logical coherence. The poem was for him a universe of its own. He made it clear that such universes are made of images, "words impressed like clay with the poet's invention", and not of booming rhetoric. The question is, to him, not one of importing images into the stream of discourse to make it more vivid; it is rather a crystallisation of the discourse into images. For all Pound's denials, it is clear that Imagisme as he visualised it came fairly directly from Hulme. 12

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10. Evolution Créatrice. p.37.

11. Le Rire. p.159.

12. But see p.28 infra.

In spite of this fact, Imagisme is not simply Symbolism masquerading under a new name, pace Rény de Gourmont's description of it as 'inverted symbolism'. Instead of suggesting to the mind of the reader, by a cumulation of tremulous images merging into one another, the poet's emotion, which always carried as an overtone a sense of mystery, de Gourmont saw the Imagiste rousing a sufficient feeling of wonder by presenting the naked impact of the object upon the senses in a concentrated metaphor; which, as will be seen, is a somewhat superficial distinction.

Pound has stated the principles on which the Imagistes agreed. There were three of them:

- "1. Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome."

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He is concerned simply with the image as thing; he considered that taking it into the realm of Hulmian metaphysics was of no use to anybody. He defines it as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time." It is the poet's 'pigment', and he must use it because he sees it or feels it, not because he thinks he can use it to back up some creed, or some system of economics or ethics. It is the presentation of this 'complex' instantaneously which gives "that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from space and time limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art."<sup>14</sup> The image, according to the Imagistes, was real because they knew

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13. "A Retrospect": Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T.S.Eliot. London; Faber & Faber 1954. p.3. Reprinted from Pavannes and Divisions, New York, Knopf, 1918.  
14. Op. cit. p.4. Reprinted from Poetry, March 1913.

it directly. If it had an age-old traditional meaning, this might prove to the student of symbology that the poet using it had "walked in some particular arbour of his traditional paradiso", but that was not the concern of the poet. He was involved only with the rendering of the image as he had perceived it or conceived it. <sup>15</sup>

In 1910 Pound had said that he believed "in an ultimate and absolute rhythm...the perception of the intellect is given in the word, that of the emotions in the cadence." <sup>16</sup> In other words, "...every emotion and every phase of emotion has some toneless phrase, some rhythm-phrase to express it." <sup>17</sup> This belief, Pound acknowledged, leads the poet to vers libre and experiments in quantitative verse. "To hold a like belief in some sort of permanent metaphor is, as I understand it, 'symbolism' in its profounder sense. It is not necessarily a belief in a permanent world, but it is a belief in that direction." <sup>18</sup> The symbolists' symbols were arbitrary, having a fixed value like numbers in arithmetic. They dealt in association; in a sort of allusion, almost of allegory. "They degraded the symbol to the status of a word." The symbol really had two fields; it could be an implication of unconventionalised fact or idea, and it could be an implication of conventionalised connotation - something little more than a metaphor, or metaphorical expression. The image, in contrast, was a concrete

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15. This theory seems to deny that a poet's sensibility is at all modified by his reading, or by tradition. It is very different from T.S. Eliot's attitude; he certainly presents images, but they carry overtones which are the result of his reading and which add to the overall effect of the poem; v. "Burbank" and "Sweeney Among the Nightingales".

16. Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti. Translated by Ezra Pound. 1912. Reprinted in The Translations of Ezra Pound, Faber & Faber, 1953. p.23.

17. Gaudier-Brzeska, A Memoir. p.97.

18. Ibid.

statement of fact, "the perfectly adequate expression of any urge, whatsoever its nature." <sup>19</sup> An excellent example of this is the way film-producers use the image in exactly the Poundian sense. Eliot summed up the definition of the image in these famous words:

"The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."

As an example of the fundamental difference, consider the methods of Pound as opposed to those of Mallarmé. The latter's polyvalent symbols and his set of private metaphors and labels are his response to an equally private mental world of appearances: as in "A la Nue Accablante." Pound's concrete imagery and his expressive rhythms are impressions of a visual world and its related complexities; his response is 'intuitive', and Mallarmé's is emotional and intellectual. <sup>20</sup>

It is thus incorrect to say that Pound's Image is "the Symbol of the French poets given a new philosophical suit." <sup>21</sup> More accurately, Pound and the Imagistes developed the theories of those poets and their philosophical apologist Bergson to a stage where the poet could more easily 'come to grips with reality', with the concrete. As Pound himself said to René Taupin:

"...l'idée de l'image doit 'quelque chose' aux symbolistes français via T.E.Hulme, via Yeats via Symons via Mallarmé. Comme le pain doit quelque chose au vanneur de blé, etc." 22

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19. Polite Essays. Ezra Pound; London, Faber & Faber, 1937. p.13. "Harold Monro"; reprinted from The Criterion, July 1932.

20. Vide Ch.7.

21. Romantic Image. Frank Kermode. London; Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957. p.130.

22. The Letters of Ezra Pound. p.295.

The acknowledgement of Hulme's influence and the recognition of his importance should not obscure the fact that Hueffer played an important rôle in the introduction of the Imagiste movement. He brought to his criticism the fruits of a long association with Conrad and a prose training which included a first-hand knowledge of the work of Stendhal, Flaubert and Maupassant; like Hardy, who also had the invaluable experience of years of novel-writing behind him when he came to publish poetry, Hueffer knew the importance of the search for the mot juste. He insisted, in the face of a still Victorian press, upon the need for good writing as opposed to the rhetorical tradition. As Pound says, it is difficult to talk about perfection without getting yourself disliked; and Hueffer, instead of having a large and tractable audience for his simple doctrine of living language and the right word, had to be content with a small circle of disciples, among whom were Flint, Douglas Goldring, Pound himself and D.H. Lawrence. The latter later appeared in some of the Imagiste anthologies, but he was 'discovered' by Hueffer who was attracted by Lawrence's skill in using the locutions of ordinary speech in his verse; verse which did so well what Masfield was trying to do that it is difficult to account for the relative contemporary acclaim accorded the effusions of the latter at the expense of the former. Flint was also an associate of Hulme, and his articles on the French symbolists published in Poetry and Drama have already been mentioned. While Pound was going to dinner with Hulme and learning theories from him, he was also associating closely with Hueffer and watching the effect of the latter's prose training on his verse. Hulme was agitating for a new method of writing verse; Hueffer

was propounding a practical doctrine, gallic in its immediate origin, but having roots which reached back to Crane and Whitman in America, Wordsworth in England, and to Horace in ancient Rome - a doctrine which has apparently been put forward by almost every poet who has tried to bring fresh life into his art.

Thus Pound in his struggle to break free from Victorianism and the narrowness of provincial thinking and feeling had the inestimably helpful support of a theorist at his right and a practising writer at his left. Hulme and Hueffer are on their way to some sort of belated recognition, and any future assessment of their work must include an appreciation of the influence they had on Pound, and through him, on the development of modern poetry.

IV

IMAGISME : NEW EYES.

"See, they return; ah, see the  
tentative  
Movements, and the slow feet..."  
("The Return")

WITH these contemporary theories in mind it is now possible to look more closely at Pound's own work. The first poems to show Imagistic influence were those in Ripostes; having surveyed the background of the movement, one can easily discern the refinements he added to its basic linguistic doctrines in terms of melopoeia, rhythm, and music, as well as his application of the concept of phanopoeia.

Imagisme as first conceived was a critical movement, one which set out to bring poetry up to the level of prose defined by Stendhal in De l'Amour.<sup>1</sup> Pound pointed out that there exists a sort of poetry where music, "sheer melody", seems as if it "were just bursting into speech", and another where painting or sculpture seems as if it were "just coming over into speech." The first is the lyric, and we are able to distinguish it easily because we are brought up to it. The second, he says,

"...is as old, and as honourable, but recently named. Ibycus and Liu Ch'e presented the 'Image'. Dante is a great poet by reason of this faculty, and Milton is a windbag because of his lack of it. The 'image' is the furthest possible remove from rhetoric. Rhetoric is the art of dressing up some unimportant matter so as to fool the audience for the time being...even Aristotle distinguishes between rhetoric, "which is persuasion", and the analytical examination of truth." 2

The 'rhetoric' abounding in Pound's earlier work is

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1. vide ch.2, p.12. supra.
  2. Gaudier-Brzeska, A Memoir: Ezra Pound. London, John Lane, 1916. p.95.

absent in Ripostes, published in 1912. The old inversions, abounding in the earlier volumes have disappeared, and the language is cleaner, saner; the artificial exclamations and the exhortations in the second person have been replaced by a new coolness and clarity which enable Pound to deal with more contemporary material. Just as important as the insistence on the just word is the other Imagiste tenet of composing in the sequence of the musical phrase and not in that of the metronome.

It is clear in Ripostes that Pound had learned that free verse demanded from the poet as much critical responsibility as poetry written in any strict metrical form. The lack of a regular metre and of rhyme should not result in scraps of disguised prose being served up as poetry in the modern style; on this point Pound distinguished Flint's interest in the vers libre of the French symbolistes from his own. Whereas Flint tolerated "toutes les fautes et imbécilités des poètes français", Pound made an "examen très sévère" and was intolerant of any slipshod workmanship. He realised that free verse could very easily lapse into monotony and flaccidity if the poet failed to exert enough critical discipline while composing, and so he sought to avoid these pitfalls by every technical means at his disposal. Holding that poetry "withers and 'dries out'" when it leaves music, imagined or not, too far behind, he attacked the current method of recitation as being oratorical, and lacking in attention to the poet's music. While pleading for an improvement in this sphere, he demanded that every serious poet should study music - not necessarily to the extent of becoming a virtuoso, but that he should learn the approximate duration of notes insofar as this had a bearing on the arrangement of words in a line of verse.

This opinion sprang from Pound's belief that the desire for vers libre was due to the sense of quantity re-asserting itself after years of starvation. He admitted the difficulty, indeed, the impracticability, of taking over into English the rules of quantity laid down for Greek and Latin; but contended that an understanding of those rules and of the relation between the length of a musical note and the sound of a given syllable would afford the poet a definite background from which he could draw.

In Arnold Dolmetsch's book, The Interpretation Of The Music Of The XVIIth And XVIIIth Centuries, Pound was to find support for his theory. He adapted Dolmetsch's points to show that what he was advocating was not, in fact, a new idea; that theories of rhythm in music were eminently applicable to poetry; and he quoted many of Dolmetsch's own quotations from old authors to show this:

"...I find that we confuse Time, or Measure, with what is called Cadence or Movement. Measure defines the quantity and equality of beats; Cadence is properly the spirit, the soul that must be added."

3

Thus François Couperin in L'Art de Toucher le Clavecin published in 1717, and Rousseau in Maitre de Musique et de Viole, 1687:

"...At this word 'movement' there are people who imagine that to give the movement is to follow and keep time; but there is much difference between the one and the other, for one may keep time without entering into the movement."

From these and similar statements Pound drew the conclusion that vers libre of a kind existed in old music. Compare Couperin again:

"...Although these Preludes are written in measured time, there is however a customary style which

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3. "Vers Libre And Arnold Dolmetsch", in The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound. Reprinted from Pavannes And Divisions; New York, Knopf, 1918.

should be followed.....Those who will use these set Preludes must play them in an easy manner, without binding themselves to strict time, unless I should have expressly marked it by the word mesuré."

"One need seek no further for proof of the recognition of vers libre in music - and this during the 'classical period'" said Pound.<sup>4</sup> "The perception of the intellect is given in the word, that of the emotions in the cadence."<sup>5</sup> Thus for Pound cadence, the rhythm innate in the word, can convey a definite meaning. It is interesting to compare with this view the strange statement of Mr. John Crowe Ransom in his otherwise informative book The New Criticism (New York; New Directions, 1941) to the effect that

"meter is not a means of expressing any part of the meaning or feeling of the poem, but...it offers an independent phonetic pleasure of its own."

Mr. Yvor Winters has successfully disposed of Mr. Ransom's immediate argument in his book In Defense of Reason, but presumably Mr. Ransom is not alone in his

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4. With regard to the disfavour in which the 'rocking-horse' rhythms of the Augustans are held by some critics, he uses his discovery to point to a possible reason for the difference of rhythms of the Augustans and the Elizabethans. Admitting that the movement toward regularity in verse during the seventeenth century seems condemnable if one compare only Dryden and Shakespeare, the reason for this movement may become apparent, he says, if one were to read some bad Elizabethan poetry. On the other hand,

"Couperin's feeling for irregularity underlying 'classical' forms may give us the clue to a wider unexpressed feeling for a fundamental irregularity which would have made eighteenth-century classicism, classicism of surface, tolerable to those who felt the underlying variety as strongly as the first regularizers may have felt it."

He finds in Shakespeare a concentration of technique on the arrangement of sounds similar to that which he is demanding:

"Shakespeare being the greatest English technician bar none, and having had the wit to concentrate technique where the most enlightened intellect would naturally concentrate technique, namely... on the twenty-six letters of his alphabet, on the quality and duration of his syllables and on the varying weights of his accent, pillaging the Italian song-books."

5. vide supra, p.36, n.13.

beliefs. As René Wellek and Austin Warren say, "the meaning of verse simply cannot be ignored in a theory of metrics."<sup>6</sup> If Ransom's theory is correct, then melopoeia, "wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning"<sup>7</sup> simply does not exist, and a foreigner listening to a poem in English, no matter how sensitive his ear, would not, by reason of his ignorance of the language, be able to appreciate any meaning in the poem at all - and that is patently untrue. Compare Pound again:

"If we ignore meaning, we give up the concept of word and phrase and thus give up the possibility of analyzing the differences between the verse of different authors. English verse is largely determined by the counterpoint between the imposed phrasing, the rhythmical impulse, and the actual speech rhythm conditioned by phrasal divisions. But the phrasal division can be ascertained only upon familiarity with the meaning of the verse." 8

It might be objected that Ransom's statement involves regular metre, and is not concerned with vers libre, which foregoes metre. But metre is essentially emphasis, and vers libre, being 'cadenced speech', also relies to a great extent on emphasis. To refute Ransom's statement, it is necessary to cite only two instances of the different ways in which metre is used. Because metre means emphasis, it can play a great part in the total meaning of a poem, since it can be used to reinforce the natural stresses of language and the emphases of rhetoric; this is abundantly illustrated in the field of satire:

"There Delphic Thomas rages on his stool,  
There Gaffer Pound still acts the ageing fool,  
Ochred and peevish in his motley dress  
Of Chinese proverbs, French and fractiousness..." 9

6. Theory of Literature. London, Jonathan Cape, 1949. p.172.

7. How to Read Ezra Pound. London, Harmsworth, 1931, p.25.

8. Wellek and Warren. Op.cit.

9. Selected Verse. John Manifold. New York, 1946.

The ictus falls, though not with inflexible regularity, where both the iambic pattern and natural speech-rhythm require it, and helps to point the poet's criticism. The other example is a good instance of Latin irony, and has a special significance after what has been said with regard to melopoeia -

"multa renascentur quae iam cecidere, cadentque  
quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula, si volet usus,  
quem penes arbitrium est..."

Surely any man reading this aloud, notwithstanding the lack of a classical education, could discern the touch of wistfulness in the falling away of the hexameters in 'quae nunc sunt in honore vocabula' and the feeling, almost one of resignation, in the spondee, 'usus'.

The poems in Personae and Exultations are more interesting, from the point of view of their author's struggle to find mastery over rhythm, than are those in Ripostes. In the latter book Pound had come a long way toward a style of his own; his belief that the poet should master all known forms and systems of metric had led to a search into those periods wherein the systems came to birth or attained their majority, and as has been said before, the earlier volumes, the 'notebooks', provide evidence of his persistent search. He was of the opinion that it would take poetry a long time to develop to a degree of modernity where it would virtually concern people who were accustomed to the prose of Henry James and Anatole France and the music of Debussy. He pointed out that it took two centuries of Provençal song and one of Tuscan to "develop the media of Dante's masterwork"; and Shakespeare needed, in addition to his own age of "painted speech", the latinists of the Renaissance, and the Pleiade.

"The experimental demonstrations of one man saves the time of many" <sup>10</sup> - hence Pound's concern with the Troubadours. He learned from Daniel and Cavalcanti that the melody of poetry depended on variations of tone quality, as opposed to that of music, which depended on variation of pitch. It was from his study of these mediaeval singers in verse that he drew the conclusion that the rhythm of any poetic line corresponded to emotion.

However, Pound stated, vers libre was not intended to be the final answer, the be-all and end-all which was to cause regular metre to fall into desuetude. It was to be used only when

"...the 'thing' builds up a rhythm more beautiful than that of set metres, or more real, more a part of the emotion of the 'thing', more germane, intimate, interpretative than the measure of regular accentual verse; a rhythm which disconcerts one with set iambic or set anapaestic." 11

"Apparuit" may be taken as an answer to those who held that the new free verse was nothing more than the easy way out for poets who were unable to display competence in strict metrical forms. Pound showed in "Dance Figure" <sup>12</sup> that vers libre with a heavily-accentuated accent could be used; his proficiency in using vers libre is demonstrated by this and other poems; in "Apparuit" he made it clear that he was sufficiently versatile and had sufficient ability in the practice of versification to do brilliantly what very few English poets had been able to do before him:

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10. "Credo" in Poetry Review, ed. H. Monro. Feb. 1912. Reprinted in Pavannes and Divisions (1918) and in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T.S. Eliot (1954) under the title "A Retrospect".

11. "A Retrospect". Pavannes and Divisions. Ezra Pound; New York, Knopf, 1918. Reprinted in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, p.12.

12. vide infra.

"Golden rose the house, in the portal I saw  
 thee, a marvel, carven in subtle stuff, a  
 portent. Life died down in the lamp and flickered,  
 caught at the wonder..."

Clothed in goldish weft, delicately perfect,  
 gone as wind ! The cloth of the magical hands!  
 Thou a slight thing, thou in access of cunning  
 dar'dst to assume this?"

(Ripostes).

The history of the imitation of classical metres in English is one of extraordinary maltreatment of the language. The imitators attempted to reproduce quantitative metres in terms of 'quantity' in English, ignoring for the most part the natural English stresses, and fastening upon English syllables 'quantities' which they do not possess. Spenser was one of the greatest sinners in this sphere: consider the following passage from his attempt at reproducing classical elegiacs:

"See ye the blindfolded pretie God, that feathered  
 Of lovers' miseries which maketh his bloodie game?"

("Elegiacs")

The quantitative scheme of classical elegiacs - couplets of dactylic hexameter and pentameter - is

- ^ \_ / - ^ \_ / - ^ \_ / - ^ \_ / - ^ \_ / - ^ \_  
 - ^ \_ / - ^ \_ / - // - ^ \_ / - ^ \_ / -

Analysing Spenser's effort one gets

See ye the/ blindfold/ed pretie/ God, that/ feathered/  
 Of lov/ers' miser/ies //which maketh/ his bloodie/  
 archer,  
 game?

which is, to say the least, puzzling. Sidney and Campion also tried their hands at the game, producing results equally unhappy. Some two hundred years later Coleridge, Southey and others made further endeavours to graft classical metres onto English poetry. A famous 'elegiac' couplet of Coleridge is obviously based on stress:

"In the hexámeter rises the fóuntain's sílvery cólumn,  
In the pentámeter éye fálling in móldy báck..."

which would have shocked any classically quantitative ear. Several poets anglicised classical metres further, by taking the quantitative basis, shifting it into its corresponding stress system, and then beginning lines with unstressed syllables before the point at which the classical stress would start, and elsewhere in the line making the stress predominant over easily 'swallowed' syllables. Thus Swinburne wrote an English 'hexameter' as follows:

"But the héart that impéls them is éven as a  
cónqueror's insátiably cráving..."

where the classicist would count twenty-two syllables, and protest that the hexameter's limit is seventeen. Clearly, quantitative versification in English must inevitably fail (although 'quantity' of a kind exists in English), because it is habitually spoken by stress - and also because the classical rule of 'length by position' is impossible to apply to a language spelt as English is spelt. It would seem that the only real way a poet can reproduce in English the metres which, reading by quantity, he hears in classical verse, is to substitute stressed syllables where the classical scheme has long ones, and unstressed where it has short. This is what Pound has done in "Apparuit". He has followed the Horatian precedent of using a spondee more often than not in the second foot, often achieving this - difficult because there are very few natural spondees in English - by using two monosyllables instead of a polysyllabic word. Compare the fourth stanza, where he manages the spondee twice

"Swift at courage thou in the shell of gold, cast-  
ing a-loose the cloak of the body, camest  
straight, then shone thine oriel and the stunned light  
faded about thee."



In "The Alchemist" much of the 'chant' effect is produced by a Miltonic use of sonorous names and a rhythm similar to that of the Catholic Litany of the Blessed Virgin. Compare

"Saïl of Claustra, Aelis, Azalais,  
Raimona, Tibors, Berangerë,  
'Neath the dark gleam of the sky;"

with part of the Litany, omitting the response until the end of the passage:

"Cause of our joy,  
Spiritual vessel,  
Vessel of honour,  
Singular vessel of devotion,  
Pray for us."



and

"Queen of Virgins,  
Queen of all Saints,  
Queen conceived without original sin,  
Queen of the most holy Rosary,  
Queen of Peace..."

with

"Elain, Tireis, Alcemena  
'Mid the silver rustling of wheat,  
Agradiva, Anhes, Ardenca,  
From the plum-coloured lake in stillness.."

The last section of the poem is reminiscent of the Agnus Dei:

"Alcyon, Phaetona, Alcmena,  
Pallor of silver, pale lustre of Latona,  
By these, from the malevolence of the dew  
Guard this alembic.  
Elain, Tireis, Allodetta  
Quiet this metal."

Pound called this poem 'Chant for the Transmutation of Metals', and as has been shown, there is a perceptible connection between it and the Litany. But the rhythm is not as regular throughout, and a brilliant example of Pound's skill in grafting a free verse beat onto a regular metrical base is

"Midonz, with the gold of the sun, the leaf of the  
poplar, by the light of the amber,  
Midonz, daughter of the sun, shaft of the tree,  
silver of the leaf, light of the yellow  
of the amber,  
Midonz, gift of the God, gift of the light, gift  
of the amber of the sun....."

where a fundamentally dactylic and choriambic metre is transformed by a mixture of anacrusis and catalectic arrangement to a passage of rhythmic verbal music with a significantly-changing stress. The polyphonic endings of most of the lines assist in the preservation of the 'chant'. This poem could be accompanied in the same way as the Troubadours improvised a bass; but the melody is in the words, in the verse itself. It would hardly be possible to set it to a regular music like that of Stravinsky (compare, for example, the Harrow School Song: "Forty years on when afar and asunder/ Parted are those who are singing today...") because the regularity of Pound's verse is not dependent on rule-of-thumb counting of syllables, but on weight felt in the ear.

Perhaps the most interesting poem in Ripostes is "The Seafarer", a translation from the Anglo-Saxon. Pound found that the 'kenning' of the original, when imitated in English, was in fact that image which he was trying to express. The kenning - "whale-road", "flesh-cover" - was an abrupt metaphor, condensed into single composite words, lacking any discursive explanation or superfluous linkage with the rest; the poet simply noted the resemblances, the affinities of different objects and brought them together into violent juxtaposition, shedding a new light on a complex which he presented with unparalleled immediacy. The method is pure phanopoeia, "the casting of images upon the visual imagination", which, as Pound says,

"...can be translated almost, or wholly, intact. When it is good enough, it is practically impossible for the translator to destroy it save by very crass bungling, and the neglect

of perfectly well-known and formulative rules."

13

He attempts to keep the rhythm of the original; each line is divided in half, with a maximum of two stresses in each section, the stress in each case being prepared by alliteration. Compare the original with Pound's version:

"Bearwas blostmum nimað, byrig faegrið,  
wongas wlitigað, worulð onetted:  
ealle þa gemoniað modes fusne  
sefan to siðe, þam þe swa þenced  
on flodwegas feor gewitan."

"Bosque taketh blossom, cometh beauty of berries,  
Fields to fairness, land fares brisker,  
All this admonisheth man eager of mood,  
The heart turns to travel so that he then thinks  
On flood-ways to be far departing."

Stopford Brooke renders this particular passage

"Trees rebloom with blossoms, burghs are fair  
again,  
Winsome are the wide plains, and the world is  
gay -  
All doth only challenge the impassioned heart  
Of his courage to the voyage, whosoever thus  
bethinks him  
O'er the ocean billows, far away to go."

It is seen that in the original and in Pound's version the number of stresses to the line is maintained, while Brooke sacrifices accuracy in this respect in order to make his alliterative words approximately the same as in the original - "winsome are the wide plains", with three accents, for "wongas wlitigað". Pound, on the other hand, instead of trying to retain some surface resemblance to the original in this way, finds the English equivalent of the kenning and uses the device of alliteration in the correct way, which is to introduce the stress. His "Seafarer" is ultimately closer to the spirit and style of the Anglo-Saxon.

Another aspect of his development is apparent in "Phasellus Ille". Here the essentials of Heine's satire - direct presentation, lack of rhetorical language - are combined with a roughly iambic rhythm to convey most successfully the controlled invective and the contemptuous tone of the poem. The first two lines are directly adapted from Catullus, but the irony is Pound's:

"Phasellus ille, quem videtis, hospites,  
ait fuisse navium celerrimus..."

"This papier-mâché, which you see, my friends,  
Saith 'twas the worthiest of editors."

The earlier adaptations from Heine were not very much more than Heine speaking in English; Pound gave them little of his own particular 'flavour', although they helped him to assimilate the idea of verse-as-speech and pointed toward the satirist of Iustra. In "Phasellus Ille", however, a new maturity in the field of rhythm and an ability to represent the Latin tone enable Pound to break away from mere translation and to give his own view of a contemporary situation. The poem is a persona, a mask; it has the flavour of the original, and yet is undoubtedly Pound's voice.

Parallel with the development in rhythm and language is Pound's development in treatment. The poems of 1909 have a definite link with those of the Imagiste period; this is how Pound himself puts it:

"In the search 'for oneself', in the search for 'sincere self-expression', one finds some seeming verity. One says 'I am' this, that, or the other, and with the words so scarcely uttered one ceases to be that thing.

I began this search for the real in a book called Personae, casting off, as it were, complete masks of the self in each poem."

14

Disregarding technical aspects such as diction and metre for the moment, it can be seen that poems like "Cino" and "Audiart" were 'personae' - or, as Hugh Kenner calls them, 'experimental personalities.' In "Cino" there are four levels of 'sense' (in the Ricardian context of meaning.) The first is Cino himself, unsatisfied and discontented with the treatment meted out to him; the second is Pound's assumption of the mask of Cino, Pound's presentation of himself in Cino's shoes, so to speak, sharing his annoyance and disgust -

"Bah! I have sung women in three cities,  
But it is all the same;  
And I will sing of the sun."

That is Pound-as-Cino, but

"I have sung women in three cities.  
But it is all one.  
I will sing of the sun.  
...eh?...they mostly had grey eyes,  
But it is all one, I will sing of the sun."

is Cino's voice alone. The third level is Pound's own personal annoyance at the fickle treatment of the artist; and this is communicated by the poem as a whole. The last is an amalgam of the three before it: a new character, a composite emotional complex made up of Cino, Pound, the imagined emotions which forced Cino to write the song, and the real emotions which forced Pound to 'translate' it. Of course it is ultimately impossible to isolate each level by quotation, but the attempt made above helps to point the argument.

The second stage, Pound hints, was reached in poems like "The Return", "which is an objective reality and has a complicated sort of existence, like Mr. Epstein's 'Sun God', or Mr. Brzeska's 'Boy with a Coney'." As he has indicated the connection with sculpture it would be stupid not to follow it

up. Hugh Kenner sums up the difference: "The analogy, that is, is no longer poet-as-actor but poet-as-sculptor." 15

"See, they return; ah, see the tentative  
Movements, and the slow feet,  
The trouble in the pace and the uncertain  
Wavering!

See, they return, one, and by one,  
With fear, as half-awakened;  
As if the snow should hesitate  
And murmur in the winds,  
and half turn back;  
These were the 'Wing'dwith-Awe',  
Inviolable.

Gods of the wingèd shoe!  
With them the silver hounds,  
sniffing the trace of air!

Haie! Haie!  
These were the swift to harry;  
These the keen-scented;  
These were the souls of blood.

Slow on the leash,  
pallid the leash-men!"

("The Return")

Here the meaning of the poem, the identity of 'they', the allusions and the rest are more interesting than relevant to the discussion. The main point to be grasped is that the experience of the hunters, the feeling of the observer, have both been crystallised out and have taken on a disembodied, impersonal existence. The poem simply is. Compared with "The Alchemist", which is on this plane little more than incantation, "The Return" demands active thought for its appreciation rather than mere unconscious cerebration.

The third stage is exemplified by "Heather", which represents "a state of consciousness, or 'implies', or 'implicates' it." As is "The Return", this poem is impersonal:

"The black panther treads at my side,  
And above my fingers

---

15. The Poetry of Ezra Pound. London; Faber & Faber, 1951. p.123.

There float the petal-like flames.  
The milk-white girls  
Unbend from the holly-trees,  
And their snow-white leopard  
Watches to follow our trace."

The "I" is not Pound but an experiencing, depersonalised personality, a 'mode of consciousness' moving through some purely mental world, some hyperaesthetic realm of thought. The representation of the 'state of consciousness' would have been ruined by the introduction of discursive matter; the locutions of ordinary speech and the words themselves, not 'bookish' or 'literary' at all, do not distract from the tone; and the free rhythm expresses the feeling to perfection - imagine the poem written in crashing iambs, and Pound's skill is obvious: form and content cannot be distinguished. "Heather", pure Imagisme, is an excellent illustration of Pound's already quoted belief that "every emotion and every phase of emotion has some toneless phrase, some rhythm-phrase to express it."

"A Russian correspondent, after having called it a symbolist poem, and having been convinced that it was not symbolism, said slowly, 'I see, you wish to give people new eyes, not to make them see some new particular thing.'" 16

Whistler in The Gentle Art said that a certain picture was interesting, not because of the identity of the model, but because it was an arrangement in colour; the same applies to "Heather" and other successful Imagiste poems; they are the illustrations of his belief in an 'absolute rhythm', and show the benefits of his earlier experiments in language, rhythms, and treatment.

The most outstanding difference between Ripostes and the earlier poems is thus the result of Pound's critical elaborations on the basic Imagiste platform. In the next chapter his energetic activities

as publicity-agent for the movement are examined, together with the dilution of Imagisme by people too lazy to adhere to the principles laid down by Pound et cie, and his consequent passing-on to Vorticism.

IMAGISME IN PRACTICE: A POINT ON THE CURVE

"Images are not decisive arguments, but, as engravings for a complicated text, they may well serve as a prop or as a guide to intelligence."

(de Gourmont, Poudre aux  
Moineaux)

An excellent opportunity arose in September 1912 for Pound to disseminate his Imagiste principles; he accepted Harriet Monroe's invitation to become the foreign correspondent of Poetry (Chicago), a new magazine, and with unflagging enthusiasm he collected material from his associates, persuaded literary 'names' to send in contributions, and left in his letters to her an invaluable mine of informed opinion and criticism of contemporary writing.

In the Spring of that year he had formulated the Imagiste position together with H.D. and Richard Aldington; Poetry offered him a heaven-sent chance to inculcate the three principles into the minds of 'les jeunes'. With Miss Monroe he worked out something new in the nature of an editorial rejection slip; this was the well-known "A Few Don'ts", which grew from the intended slip to a detailed list of points on which, Pound considered, contemporary poets needed re-orientation.

The section on language began with the warning against the use of superfluous words. This, Pound reasoned, was one of the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of the aspirant poet. The only valid difference between poetry and prose, he maintained, was that poetry was the more concentrated form of expression. Any adjective which was not essential to the whole, which

did not reveal 'something', lowered this threshold and brought the poem closer to the level of prose. Abstractions were to be avoided as much as possible; the mixing of an abstraction with a concrete image, "dim lands of peace", dulled the effect of the metaphor; such expressions, Pound held, came "from the writer's not realising that the natural object is always the adequate symbol." Ornament was inadmissible, unless it was "good ornament".

Concerning rhythm and rhyme, the "candidate" was advised to fill his mind with the finest cadences he could discover. These were to be preferably in a foreign language, so that the meanings of the words might be less likely to divert his attention from the movement. Pound suggested for study and dissection into their component parts the lyrics of Goethe, the verse of Dante, Hebridean folk-songs, and the work of Villon, Gautier ("when he is not too frigid"), Heine, Sappho, and Catullus. The learner poet should know intimately all the technical devices of his art - alliteration, assonance, immediate and delayed rhyme, and simple and polyphonic rhyme, just as he would expect a musician to be conversant with the minutiae of his craft. Pound had educated himself in these skills: "The Seafarer", in addition to helping him in the expression of the Image, had trained him in alliteration; and the Provençal canzone had given him a good grounding in the intricacies of delayed rhyme and polyphonic endings. The weight of emphasis in "A Few Don'ts" was laid on workmanship; there were too many people, he told Miss Monroe, who

"...don't care for the master-work, who set out as artists with no intention of producing it, who make no effort towards the best, who are content with publicity and the praise of reviewers."

The standard to be attained was of work which was to be 'good' for the artist, whose only respectable aim should be perfection, and not work which was simply good enough for the public:

"...the infinite gulph between what you read and enjoy and what you set up as a model..." 2

an example of which would be, on the one hand, Dante's Divine Comedy, and on the other, the ornament of Petrarch. Pound once argued about the merits of the latter with an eminent Italian critic, finally forcing him to admit that Petrarch was acceptable when opposed to Dante only 'because one occasionally liked a chocolate cream'. Miss Monroe considered that Pound undervalued élan and enthusiasm; he countered that he saw "a whole country rotted with it, and no one to insist that 'form' and innovation (were) compatible." The text to preach on was the difference between "enthusiastic slop and great art" -

"...whom do you know who takes the Art of poetry seriously? As seriously that is as a painter takes painting? Who Cares?...Who will stand for a level of criticism even when it throws out most of their own work?" 3

Certain disappointed critics have condemned Pound for 'having so little to say' in his poetry prior to 1920. They regard his excursions into the Middle Ages as a waste of time, failing to see that the overwhelming bulk of this early poetry constitutes the record of his self-imposed search for adequate methods of expression.

"I know there are a lovely lot who want to express their own personalities, I have never doubted it for an instant." 4

Pound had indicated in Personae that he knew what he wanted to say:

".....when  
That great sense of power is upon me

---

2. Ibid. p.98.

3. Ibid. p.51.

4. Ibid.

And I see my greater soul-self bending  
Sibylwise with that great forty year epic  
That you know of, yet unwrit....."

("Scriptor Ignotus")

but as yet he did not have the necessary ability, the necessary technique and experience to 'express his own personality'. He believed that nothing short of perfection was worth while, and the early poems are the evidence of this belief. Undisciplined enthusiasm was dangerous:

"There's no use in a strong impulse if it is all or nearly all lost in bungling transmission and technique. This obnoxious word that I'm always brandishing about means nothing but a transmission of the impulse intact. It means that you not only get the thing off your own chest, but that you get it into someone else's." 5

Thus the poet should know his art. He should realise that poetry is an activity which demands full attention, endless practice, and above all, discipline. Too many people regarded it as a pastime for the leisured, something to be attempted in an amateurish way; an attitude which allowed shortsighted imitation and which stifled invention. Pound's "pawing over the ancients and semi-ancients" had been a conscious struggle to find out what had been done better than it had ever been done again, and

"...to find out what remains for us to do, and plenty does remain, for if we still feel the same emotions as those which launched the thousand ships, it is quite certain that we come on those feelings differently, through different nuances, by different intellectual gradations. Each age has its own abounding gifts yet only some ages transmute them into matter of duration. No good poetry is ever written in a manner twenty years old, for to write in such a manner shows that the writer thinks from books, convention and cliché, and not from life, yet a man feeling the divorce of life and his art may naturally try to resurrect a forgotten mode if he finds in that mode some leaven, or if he think he sees in it some element lacking in contemporary art which might unite that art again to its sustenance, life." 6

5. Ibid. p.60.

6. "Credo", in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound. Reprinted from Poetry Review Feb. 1912. p.11.

It has been said that Imagisme was primarily conceived as a critical movement, designed to bring poetry up to the level of prose; contemporary poetry was sorely in need of competent criticism, and Pound with his vision of perfection found Harriet Monroe's magazine to be the necessary platform.

The April 1913 number of Poetry brought out a new series of Pound's poetry - "Contemporania". The poem "Commission" furnishes a good example of his effort to purify his language in the light of his own Imagiste strictures. Although there had been a considerable refinement of the bookishness of his early verse, some of Pound's inclination toward slightly archaic language, a little removed from the casual tongue, had been noticeable even in Ripostes - the 'phrases of a literary man'. But in "Commission" and its companion pieces that poetry which Pound had prophesied in 1912 as

"...moving against poppy-cock...harder and saner... as much like granite as it can be, its force...in its truth, its interpretative power; I mean it will not try to seem forcible by rhetorical din, and luxurious riot. We will have fewer painted adjectives impeding the shock and stroke of it. At least for myself I want it so, austere, direct, free from emotional slither..." 7

was fully apparent. Here was the language of prose used in a simple, direct and objective way:

"Go, my songs, to the lonely and unsatisfied,  
Go also to the nerve-racked, go to the enslaved-  
by-convention,  
Bear to them my contempt for their oppressors.  
Go as a great wave of cool water,  
Bear my contempt of oppressors....."

("Commission")

This poem is interesting in the light of Eliot's statement that "it is indeed obvious...that Pound owes nothing to Whitman." 8 The initial repetitions, the

7. Ibid.

8. Introduction to Ezra Pound: Selected Poems, ed. T.S. Eliot. London; Faber & Faber 1928. Reissued 1948. p.8.

balanced lines, the loose cadence, and the catalogue -

"Go to the bourgeoisie who is dying of her ennui,  
Go to the women in suburbs,  
Go to the hideously wedded,  
Go to them whose failure is concealed,  
Go to the unluckily mated,  
Go to the bought wife,  
Go to the women entailed..."

seen without doubt to be an intention to recapture the peculiarities of Whitman's style. Compare part of the "Song of Myself" with the above:

"Have you heard that it was good to gain the day?  
I also say that it is good to fall, battles are  
lost in the same spirit in which they are won...  
Vivas to those who have failed!  
And to those whose war-vessels sank in the sea!  
And to those themselves who sank in the sea!  
And to all generals who lost engagements, and all  
overcome heroes!  
And to the numberless unknown heroes equal to the  
greatest heroes known!"

Further examples of this rapport are obvious in "Further Instructions":

"Come, my songs, let us express our baser passions,  
Let us express our envy of the man with a steady  
job and no worry about the future.  
You are very idle, my songs.  
I fear you will come to a bad end.  
You stand about in the streets,  
You loiter at the corners and bus-stops,  
You do next to nothing at all..."

and in "Dum Capitolium Scandet":

"How many will come after me  
singing as well as I sing, none better;  
Telling the heart of their truth  
as I have taught them to tell it;  
Fruit of my seed,  
O my unnameable children.  
Know then that I loved you from afore-time,  
Clear speakers, naked in the sun, untrammelled."

In "Salutation" there is the same repetition and the typical Whitmanesque sympathy with the 'common man', and the praise of the insouciance of animals:

"O generation of the thoroughly smug  
and thoroughly uncomfortable,  
I have seen fishermen picnicking in the sun,  
I have seen them with untidy families,  
I have seen their smiles full of teeth  
and heard ungainly laughter.  
And I am happier than you are,  
And they were happier than I am;

And the fish swim in the lake  
and do not even own clothing."

Eliot had a chance to retract his dogmatic denial of Whitman's influence on Pound in 1948 when his selection of the latter's poetry was reissued, but he failed to do so. There can be little support for his view on the internal evidence of most of the "Contemporania" collection; even ignoring points of style there is the following acknowledgement by Pound himself, printed with the other poems:

"I make a pact with you, Walt Whitman -  
I have detested you long enough.  
I come to you as a grown child  
Who has had a pig-headed father;  
I am old enough now to make friends.  
It was you that broke the new wood,  
Now is a time for carving.  
We have one sap and one root -  
Let there be commerce between us."

("A Pact")

In another poem of this period Pound shows how completely he had sloughed off the literary language and forms of the pre-1912 volumes. Flat statement is the mode of expression; the 'ornament' - if it can be called that - is 'good ornament', in that it is an integral part of the poem, contributing to the general tone, indispensable. There is no emotional slither; the rhythm is that of ordinary measured speech, slowed down by alliteration and long vowel-sounds:

"This lady in the white bath-robe which she calls a  
peignoir,  
Is, for the time being, the mistress of my friend,  
And the delicate white feet of her little dog  
Are not more delicate than she is,  
Nor would Gautier himself have despised their  
contrasts in whiteness  
As she sits in the great chair  
Between the two indolent candles."

("Albâtre")

Among the poets who subscribed to the Imagiste principles in the first wave of enthusiasm were H.D., Richard Aldington, John Gould Fletcher, Amy Lowell, and William

Carlos Williams. Pound persuaded Miss Monroe to print H.D.'s "The Garden" - pure Imagisme which must have rocked back on their heels the "imbeciles" who were still pouring out such nonsense as

"Stream, stream, stream  
Oh the willows by the stream;  
The poplars and the willows  
And the gravel all agleam!"

9

which appeared in Poetry in 1913, in the middle of the Imagisme furore. "The Garden" observed closely the original three Imagiste principles; not one word out of place or redundant; a rhythm tenuous and delicate, innate in the words themselves; and direct presentation of the idea:

"You are clear,  
O rose, cut in rock,  
hard as the descent of hail.

I could scrape the colour  
from the petals,  
like spilt dye from a rock.  
If I could break you  
I could break a tree.

If I could stir  
I could break a tree -  
I could break you.

11

O wind, rend open the heat,  
cut apart the heat,  
slit it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop  
through this thick air;  
fruit cannot fall into heat  
that presses up and blunts  
the points of pears,  
and rounds grapes.

Cut the heat:  
plough through it,  
turning it on either side  
of your path."

Retrospectively, Pound also saw Imagistic merit in some of the verse of Harold Monro and Lionel Johnson. And Yeats, when he had purged himself of the mistiness of his Celtic Twilight period, also wrote "des Images in

9. Quoted by D.D. Paige in his introduction to The Letters of Ezra Pound. p.23.

such poems as Braseal and the Fisherman... he (had) driven out the inversion and written with such prose directness in such lyrics as, 'I heard the old men say everything alters'."<sup>10</sup> Pound considered that Yeats had set an example as to the form of the lyric or the short poem containing an image which, however, had been obscured by his "so very poetic language". But nel mezzo del cammin Yeats' poetry, as everyone knows, underwent a change, and in 1912 Pound could say

"Mr. Yeats has once and for all stripped English poetry of its perdamnable rhetoric. He has boiled away all that is not poetic...he has made our poetic idiom a thing pliable, a speech without inversions."<sup>11</sup>

The 'new note' had been there as long before as in "No Second Troy" of 1910; but really became clear in the volume Responsibilities of 1914:

"Now as at all times I can see in the mind's eye,  
In their stiff, painted clothes, the pale unsatisfied  
ones  
Appear and disappear in the blue depth of the sky  
With all their ancient faces like rain-beaten stones,  
And all their helms of silver hovering side by side."

("The Magi")

Perhaps the fact that Pound had spent the winter of 1913 with Yeats - a visit which he considered would bore him to tears but which he regarded as "a duty to posterity" - helped to clarify the 'new note'.

Reference has already been made to Pound's idea of the poetry which seemed to be music just forcing its way into articulate speech, and that which seemed to be painting or sculpture 'coming over' into words. He considered that in the latter case the gulf between evocation and mere description was, in fact, the difference "between genius and talent"; perhaps, he said in the essay on Yeats' Responsibilities, "it is...the highest

10. "The Later Yeats". Reprinted in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, from Poetry, May 1914. p.379.

11. "Credo". Reprinted in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound from Poetry Review, February 1912. p.11-12.

function of art that it should fill the mind with a noble profusion of sounds and images, that it should furnish the life of the mind with such accompaniment and surrounding." William Carlos Williams put forward the same view in a different way in his Imagiste poem "The Red Wheelbarrow", when he pointed out that

"so much depends  
upon  
  
a red wheel  
barrow  
  
glazed with rain  
water  
  
beside the white  
chickens"

\* \* \* \* \*

Unfortunately, the admirable condensation of the Imagistes, their clarity springing from lack of literary dilution and verbose confusion, fell victim to what Harriet Monroe's editorial associate, Alice Corbin Henderson, called "the futility of trying to impose a selective taste upon the naturally unselective." The entire framework of Imagisme was built on a core of form, and its practitioners had to adhere to this form to avoid falling into undisciplined expression of experience and emotion.

Various critics have imputed the decline of the movement to flaws which they allege are inherent in the methods which it proposed. They fasten with triumph upon the statement, "the great aim is precise and definite definition", and leap to the conclusion that under Imagisme description and evaluation become separate acts; that Imagiste poetry simply describes, and the justification of description by the universalization of the thing described is absent. The reason for this is that the Imagiste poet, qua Imagiste, must keep his language neutral to the object he is describing. He is permitted to introduce certain preconceptions and to colour the

poem with a given emotional mood, but, they say, the mood necessarily remains static. The mood is not created, but asserted: the natural result of regarding the thing represented as something external to the act of representation. The ultimate consequence is that the poet is forced to keep out of his poem all moral imperatives, all evaluations, all generalisations, which in other poetry provide the poetic validity of the experience. Thus the 'image' is cut off from any synthesis with the universal; it has, to be sure, its own life, but separated from the 'context of the whole' it is devoid of any significance. There is no fusion of the general with the particular. Imagery is separated from comment, and the reader is compelled to distinguish the technique from the thing which the technique was devised to express. The logical end is the poet's (supposed) obsession with nothing but a string of minute, concrete images, unrelated to anything. This criticism is true when applied to poems which are nothing more than a series of sketches passing in rapid succession, with the purpose of imparting a nuance of emotion or suggesting some indescribable *état d'âme* by the use of a string of superficially related concrete symbols - all minutely appropriate, but generally resisting synthesis; an example of which is a good number of the poems forming the series "Serres Chaudes" by Maeterlinck. Concerning Imagisme as Pound, H.D. and Aldington first conceived it, the criticism is untenable.

The fundamental misconception arises from the arbitrary and quite unjustifiable equation of definition with description. The 'definition' of an emotion or an event was for the Imagiste not necessarily a description of it; he tried to present his subject as an emotional and intellectual complex perceived in an instant of time.

If he succeeded in doing this, then the 'complex', over and above its existence as a concrete particularisation, would have a significant universal validity because the reader would have had it handed over to him without the distracting interference of the poet's moral opinions, without the distraction caused by the intrusion of the poet's 'self'. In other words, a successful Imagiste poem would enable the reader to intuit the experience of the poet directly, and so give the presented complex a poetic validity by allowing the reader to 'get into his own chest' what the poet had got off his. The anti-Imagiste critics seem to believe that significance depends entirely upon the presence of comment by the poet; they deny that comment is compatible with Imagiste principles. There would seem to be some confusion here, as they admit the introduction of certain preconceptions and the colouring of a given emotional mood, and in the same breath assert that this has no effect on the function of the poem. What they fail to realise is that the Imagiste 'commented', not by thrusting his personal moral or ethical belief on the reader, but by his treatment of the subject. In the last chapter the use of rhythm in this connection was explained; it remains to point out that the Image itself was a kind of comment: consider as an example another poem by Williams:

"A rumpled sheet  
of brown paper  
about the length  
  
And apparent bulk  
of a man was  
rolling with the  
  
wind slowly over  
and over in  
the street as  
  
a car drove down  
upon it and  
crushed it to

the ground. Unlike  
a man it rose  
again rolling  
with the wind over  
and over to be as  
it was before."

("The Term")

Poetry, according to the Imagistes, should deal with what was seen or felt. In a measure, the strict discipline and the demand for the exact rendering of particulars, the insistence on direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective, were provoked by the worn-out mannerisms of Victorian verse; verse which presented its 'comment' in vague generalities. The Imagistes felt that the best way to convey even spiritual relations was by their suggestive concretion into an Image. It was for this reason that they tried to effect a change in poetic technique from that employed by the 'cosmic' poets, who, they considered, shirked the real difficulties of the art.

In addition to the fact that the Imagiste creed was, for minds steeped in the 'tradition' of Victorian verse, very difficult to follow, Pound's disciples for the most part after the initial jet of enthusiasm did not bother to continue with the discipline upon which he insisted. The decadence of the movement may be symbolised in the career of Amy Lowell, whose work was introduced to Pound by Harriet Monroe. An early Imagiste poem of hers was allowed into the anthology Des Imagistes, which was published in February 1914. On Pound's encouragement she left Boston and came to London, mixing with 'les jeunes' and slowly turning her particular brand of Imagisme into a crusade for the 'new poetry'. The presentation of an Image became, for her, less important than forcing vers libre into the skulls of an apathetic public, and she very soon aroused

Pound's wrath by proposing to bring out an annual "Imagist Anthology" which was to include the verse of poets who had no connection with Imagisme beyond the fact that they wrote in free verse. Pound refused to have anything to do with the book, considering that it misrepresented the conclusions which it had taken him years of hard work to come to. He wrote to her and pointed out that to call the book 'Imagiste' would be a gross mis-statement of fact, as most of the contributors had not taken the trouble to find out what the term meant; it had become associated with "a certain clarity and intensity", with "hard light, clear edges", and he wished it to retain some sort of meaning beyond a mere pseudonym for free verse. Amy Lowell was unrepentant, and when her next book of poetry appeared - Sword Blades and Poppy Seeds, October 1914 - she advertised it in Poetry with subline arrogance:

"Of the poets who today are doing the interesting and original work, there is no more striking and unique (sic) figure than Amy Lowell. The foremost member of the 'Imagists' - a group of poets that includes William Butler Yeats (sic), Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Hueffer - she has won wide recognition for her writing in new and free forms of poetical expression."

12

Her 'forms of poetical expression' became so free, in fact, that they showed no sign of agreement with the second Imagiste specification at all - to use no superfluous word. Miss Lowell's talents lay in the field of organisation, not in the writing of good free verse. She and her clique brought a prolixity and verbosity to vers libre as bad as that in the very forms which vers libre had been devised to counteract. A poet using a regular metrical pattern had at least the transparent excuse that superfluous words were sometimes necessary to fill the pattern or to complete

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12. Quoted by D.D. Paige in The Letters of Ezra Pound, p.84.

a rhyme-scheme; but the Amygists, as Pound dubbed them, fell to using language and phrasing as bad as that of their predecessors without having even that excuse to fall back upon. The 'music' of the lines was at times so tenuous that it was almost non-existent; at others what passed for vers libre was merely thinly disguised regular metre, as stale and hackneyed as any pseudo-Swinburnian; while on frequent occasions the reader could distinguish no musical structure at all, but could only decide that the 'free verse' was nothing more than prose chopped up into irregular lines. The Amygists did not realise, as Eliot did, that "no vers is libre for the man who wants to do a good job." Pound's curt comment on them and on Amy, who wanted to make poetry into a "democratic beer-garden", was succinct:

"Soi-disant 'imagists' - 'bunch of goups' trop paresseux pour supporter sévérité de mes premiers 'Don'ts' et du clause 2me du manifeste."  
13

and anyway, Imagisme was "a point on the curve of (his) development" at which the "bunch of goups" stayed; he moved on.

REFRIST: IMAGISME AND JAPANESE POETRY.

"...an intellectual and  
emotional complex..."

("A Retrospect")

French poetry and vers libre were not the sole interests of the Poets' Club of Hulme and Flint in the years before the Great War. Writing a short history of the Imagiste movement for The Egoist in 1915, Flint said that he had been advocating in the course of a series of articles "a poetry in vers libre, akin in spirit to the Japanese." Japanese art had first been transmitted to the French, the principle literary influence being the short verse-form of the hokku. In general, French translators and critics called the form haikai; the English chose the alternative term hokku. It is justifiable to conclude that Flint and the Club were introduced to the form through their French studies, and it is clear that they desired something more than a 'spiritual' kinship with it, for Flint in the same article went on to say

"We proposed at various times to replace  
(conventional verse) by pure vers libre; by the  
Japanese tanka and haikai."

Since Pound joined the Poets' Club in 1909, it is reasonable to deduce that he was introduced to Japanese poetry at its meetings, and as he speaks of hokku, one may take it for granted that he learned more about it in the writings of the English commentators.

His interest in things Japanese is apparent in another context. One of his first poems to appear in Poetry was "To Whistler, American", a piece which ostensibly is an attack on American philistinism. <sup>1</sup>

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1. Vide ch.12

The attack tends to obscure Pound's homage to his fellow-expatriate's fame in introducing the principles of Japanese art to England. But two years later, in The Egoist for June 1st., 1914, he repeated the gist of the poem in a biography of "Edward Wadsworth, Vorticist", and took care to hammer home the lesson:

"I trust that the gentle reader is accustomed to take pleasure in 'Whistler and the Japanese.' Otherwise he had better stop reading my article until he has treated himself to some further draughts of education.

From Whistler and the Japanese...the 'world', that is to day, the fragment of the English-speaking world that spreads itself into print, learned to enjoy 'arrangements' of colours and masses."

Quite clearly he had been interested in Japanese art for some time. It should be made clear that the European art world met Japanese pottery, woodcuts, and lacquer-work long before it met the poetry, and this is also true in Pound's individual case. The priority meant that the poet's impressions of the 'new' poetry were necessarily modified to some degree, however unconsciously, by his previous impressions of work in visual media. Consequently, Pound and the others formulating the Imagiste theories, and taking into account Japanese art and poetry, tended to regard the Image in a visual sense. This usually ruled out a conception of the Image as an impression of any of the other senses, and also precluded using the term to describe any merely metaphorical figure. Pound's writings on the Image, his interest in Gaudier-Brzeska, Lewis, Wadsworth, Whistler and the state of European art in general, and of course the evidence of his own poetry confirm this suggestion. As has been shown, various other elements in addition to the Japanese contributed to the general principles of Imagisme, but Pound clearly used 'Japanese art and poetry' as points of reference in developing his theories of the Image and in his poetry from then on.

Hokku was evolved in the mid-seventeenth century from the classical rhythm of Japanese poetry - alternate lines of five and seven syllables - resulting in a short poetic form of seventeen syllables. Under the strict rules of versification, each hokku was obliged to concern itself, preferably by implication, with a season of the year. This limitation might seem to be most constraining, but the Japanese were able to transcend the narrow bounds of the form by a style of condensation, suggestion, ellipsis, and image; in addition, each reference to the flora and fauna characteristic of each season was bound up with centuries of religious and poetic practice. It was also established custom for poets to echo older well-known poems and so to communicate overtones which would otherwise be non-existent. It would thus be most difficult for anyone not having a thorough knowledge of the Japanese language and culture to appreciate fully the whole meaning of any given hokku; and Pound being in this position, it was the employment of the imagery which caught his attention. His understanding of the form was limited to the imagistic technique, and to the condensation and suggestiveness which are integral parts of the method of hokku. It will illustrate the fact that 'hokku misunderstood' is a key to some of Pound's theories regarding the Image and to some of his poetry if an actual example to which he refers is analysed.<sup>2</sup> The hokku under examination is a very early one, written by Moritake (1472-1549):

"Rakka-eda ni	To the branch of falling flowers
Kaeru to mireba:	Seems to return (a flower):
Kocho kana.	A small butterfly."

Punctuation was omitted in early oriental poetry; the

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2. The following analysis and explanation are taken from Mr. Earl Miner's The Japanese Tradition in British and American Literature. Princeton University, 1958.

characters were written down with regular spaces between each one to enable the reader to draw as many associations as possible. Using English punctuation, not existing in the original, a second reading gives

"To the branch a fallen flower  
Returns; when I look,  
It is a small butterfly."

This second reading depends on the separation of the compound rakka-eda and on a different reading of the syntax of the second line. Combining both readings:

"Petals return unto the branch  
Of falling flowers: returning I see  
A fluttering butterfly."

Clearly the flowers are past their prime, and as they flutter down it seems to the poet that some of them are flying back to the branch; he discovers that he is watching a butterfly. Mr. Miner explains the deeper symbolism:

"Cherry blossoms are the glory of spring and the symbol of delicate natural beauty; it is pathetic that they must fall. However, they are replaced in the natural order by the butterfly, which brings promises of summer and other kinds of beauty. From the poet's delightful confusion of flower and butterfly we know that the cherry blossoms must be white to be mistaken for a butterfly, and that the butterfly must indeed be lovely if it can be mistaken for cherry blossoms, which are of such surpassing beauty that the haiku poet needs refer to them only as 'flowers' to be understood.

If we examine the symbols still further, we see that in a sense the poet did see the flowers return to the bough. He has witnessed one of nature's metamorphoses; the flowers fell, and arose, so to speak, in a new incarnation. Beauty of one kind passes by changing into beauty of another form. Fundamentally, then, this poem rests upon Buddhist assumptions concerning nature; all natural beauty is transitory and fleeting, but the principle of beauty lives on in the ever-changing, ever constant metamorphoses of the seasons. Moritake delineates both constancy and change; for the Buddhist the two are polar principles which depend on each other for their existence."

As will be seen, Found's perception of the meaning of this poem goes no further than the first level. But perhaps the most striking evidence that he 'misunderstood' the hokku, but found it an invaluable addition to his

repertoire is to be found in his "Fan-Piece, For Her Imperial Lord":

"O fan of white silk,  
clear as frost on the grass-blade,  
You also are laid aside."

It can hardly be a coincidence that this poem is made up of seventeen words, arranged in the traditional pattern of five, seven, and five in three lines. With the help of the title, it is clear that the poem is one sent by a woman to her 'imperial lord'. She shows her tact by addressing it to his fan, and not directly to himself. The stressed also in the last line indicates the nature of her complaint - she, too, has been cast off. The significance of the image is twofold; not only is the white silk to the fan as the white frost is to the grass, but there is a symbolic meaning: just as frost on blades of grass melts away in the morning sun, so beautiful fans are used by imperial lords only for a short time, and also the beauty of a woman serves as an attraction for but a little while. This is a satisfying poem, a successful one, made so by a fusion of imagery, rhythm and suggestion. But it differs in three ways from hokku proper: first, it deviates from the strict rule limiting hokku to treatment of nature subjects. Secondly, it lacks the necessary emphasis on nature which is characteristic of hokku. Frost suggests Winter, but Pound does not use it in this way. And thirdly, it is without the deeper religious meaning symbolised by images having a religious significance. But it would be pedantic in the extreme to condemn it on these grounds; Pound does not pretend to have followed the 'tradition', and his success lies in the degree to which he has emulated the technique and in the skilful reproduction of the tone of melancholy and wistfulness which is common in oriental poetry.

He attested to his absorption in hokku in 1912. In the article on Vorticism in the September 1914 issue of The Fortnightly Review (reprinted in essence in his memoir of Gaudier) he showed how hokku contributed to the composition of the poem "In a Station of the Metro":

"Three years ago (1911) in Paris I got out of a 'metro' train at La Concorde, and saw suddenly a beautiful face and another and another...and I tried all that day for words, for words for what that had meant for me...And that evening...I found suddenly the expression...not in speech but in sudden blotches of colour. It was just that - a pattern or hardly a pattern if by pattern you mean something with a repeat in it. But it was a word, the beginning for me of a new language in colour...

I wrote a thirty-line poem and destroyed it because it was what we call work of the second intensity. Six months later I made a poem half that length; a year later (1912) I made the following hokku-like sentence.

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

3

This is not 'hokku-like' just because the poem is short and the Image vaguely Japanese. His debt to hokku is definite and profound:

"The Japanese have had the same sense of exploration. They have understood the beauty of this sort of knowing...The Japanese have evolved the form of the hokku.

'The fallen blossom flies back to its branch:  
A butterfly.'

That is the substance of a very well-known hokku."

('This sort of knowing' being imagistic, as opposed to lyric writing.) In other words, the Imagiste (and, to Pound, the hokku-writer,) is not concerned with getting down the general look of the 'thing'. He praises not, neither does he blame; and he does not tell the reader what to feel. What is implicit in the form is nothing less than the process of cognition itself. Concerning this perception he propounds one of the Vorticist theories applied to poetry, and, in doing so, defines

the technique which he had adopted in the modified hokku:

"The 'one-image poem' is a form of super-position, that is to say, it is one idea set on top of another. I found it useful for getting out of the impasse in which I had been left by my metro emotion.....In a poem of this sort one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective. I wrote a thirty-line poem..."

4

Clearly, this technique of 'super-position' evolved out of Pound's knowledge of Japanese poetry, because he thought that he was imitating or actually using the whole technique of hokku. But just as clearly, he was in reality utilising only one of the methods employed by hokku to overcome the limitations of its brevity. From the pedantic standpoint, this leaves him open to the charge of inadequate understanding of Japanese poetry; but from another, it gives the reader a glimpse of the creative process which justifies that misunderstanding.

With regard to Imagisme, it is interesting to note that the excellences of Japanese poetry are exactly the practical outcome of the techniques propounded in the manifesto of that movement. It is even more interesting, when considering the part which hokku played in the formulation of the theories of Imagisme, to compare Pound's description of the experience in the Metro ("that sudden emotion" and the "expression.. not in speech but in sudden splotches of colour") with his famous definition of the Image in Poetry, March 1913:

"...an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time...it is the presentation of such an image which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from space and time limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art."

It will be agreed that this definition owes an obvious debt to Japanese poetry; it should be noted that it comes well after Pound's discovery of hokku, but before his possession of Professor Fenollosa's oriental manuscripts. Kenner would have us understand that Pound received the manuscripts - which included the notes and glosses on the Noh plays - after the publication of Lustra in 1916<sup>5</sup>; but Pound became Fenollosa's literary executor long before this date, for in a letter to William Carlos Williams dated December 19th., 1913, the following sentence stands out:

"I am very placid and happy and busy. Dorothy is learning Chinese. I've all old Fenollosa's treasures in manuscript."

6

The point of this apparent quibble over chronology is that the Image as defined above does not suggest the kind of image which Pound later described as the unifying reference-point in a long poem. Thus, it is justifiable to believe that his definition of the Image is, to a certain degree, based on his enthusiasm for hokku, and not solely on the French theories of the earlier Imagiste group - Hulme, Flint, et al - and certainly not on his other readings in oriental literature; although Hulme's theories had a profound effect on Imagisme's critical principles and on the concept of the Image itself, as has been pointed out.

Keeping in mind the fact that Pound's Image developed into the well-known brief, unrelated sense-perception, it is possible to see just what it was in the hokku that attracted him, and how it contributed to that development. As indicated above, the very strictness of the hokku form demanded an extraordinary

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5. Vide Kenner's The Poetry of Ezra Pound, p.137.

6. The Letters of Ezra Pound. p.65.

condensation of language, precluding at once any florid rhetoric or unnecessary verbiage. As a young man Pound had written

"The true poet is most easily distinguished from the false, when he trusts himself to the simplest expression, and when he writes without adjectives." 7

and in an early essay on Dante:

"Saving the grace of a greatly honored scholar, to speak of the Vita Nuova as 'embroidered with conceits' is arrant nonsense. The Vita Nuova is strangely unadorned; more especially is this evident if it be compared with work of its own date. It is without strange, strained simile.

Anyone who has in any degree the faculty of vision will know that the so-called personifications are real and not artificial. Dante's precision both in the Vita Nuova and in the Commedia comes from the attempt to reproduce exactly the thing which has been clearly seen." 8

This outlook must have welcomed Hulme's insistence on "absolutely accurate presentation and no verbiage"; and must have accepted with delight the (apparent) clarity and compactness of hokku. I have shown how Pound regarded the imagery of hokku primarily as visual, and it is plain that the technique of that form demanded more than anything else a pictorial, or visual effect. (It is worth noting that most European lyric poetry treats of love in some way, either presenting the poet as a potential lover or apostrophising a loved one - in any case, presenting a subjective view. The rules regarding hokku precluded the direct treatment of love entirely, leaving this to the thirty-one syllable waka, and required an objective attitude on the part of the poet.) This suited the Imagiste idea of the presentation of "a delicate pattern of images and colour" eminently. The good Imagiste poem achieved its effect by presenting clearly-defined, concrete images which resulted in the juxtaposition of two worlds of

7. The Spirit of Romance (1910) p.208.  
8. Ibid. p.126.

perception striking light from their interaction -

"Light, form, movement, glitter, scent, sound, suddenly apprehended as givers of delight, as interpreters of the inner vitality, not as the customary aspect of things..."

as Aldington had it in Death of a Hero. The good hokku achieved part of its effect - the part immediately obvious to the uninitiated reader like Pound - by the same process. As Kenner realises, the action of hokku depends on Aristotle's central plot-device, peripeteia; in essence, the 'reversal of the situation' consists in the throwing-together of two 'worlds of perception' into normally unusual opposition, and the consequent production of an illuminating perspective through the unexpected incongruity. Consider again Pound's own example:

"The fallen blossom flies back to its branch:  
A butterfly."

Or take his "Epitaphs":

"Fu I loved the high cloud and the hill,  
Alas, he died of alcohol."

"And Li Po also died drunk.  
He tried to embrace a moon  
In the Yellow River."

Like the hokku, the device of metaphor deals in exceedingly condensed juxtapositions. (Some critics of Imagisme see it as metaphor gone to seed, a periphrastic way of saying something else.) Pound has several times cited with approval Aristotle's praise of a command of metaphor:

"...But the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances." 9

That is, for the similarity of dis-similars; and metaphor is effective, because the juxtapositions illuminate each other. Immediately the Imagiste's distrust of what Hulme called 'plain speech' comes to

mind, and his consequent conclusion that only by good metaphor could rhetoric and discursiveness be avoided.

The first volume to contain evidence of extensive use of the 'super-position' technique was Iustra. Included in this book were some of the poems which had originally appeared in BLAST of June 1914 as examples of Verticist<sup>10</sup> poetry:

"Green arsenic smeared on an egg-white cloth,  
Crushed strawberries! Come, let us feast our eyes."  
("L'Art, 1910")

Here the technique of "In A Station of the Metro" has been reversed; the image is presented first, and then the non-imagistic invitation appears, achieving its effect in perspective by incongruity. Another poem from the same magazine is "Women Before a Shop":

"The gew-gaws of false amber and false turquoise  
attract them.  
'Like to like nature': these agglutinous yellows!"

In this poem the title forms an integral part of the whole, and it is the last phrase which is 'super-imposed' on the rest. Another poem using the technique, and especially interesting for its Heine-like humour, is "The Bath Tub":

"As a bath tub lined with white porcelain,  
When the hot water gives out or goes tepid,  
So is the slow cooling of our chivalrous passion,  
O my much praised but-not-altogether-  
satisfactory lady."

The irony is emphasised by the sarcastic use of the courtly language more familiar in Pound's Provençal love personae, and by a device which the Imagistes were fond of using - the elaborate pseudo-Biblical simile. In "Gentildonna" the super-pository technique is strikingly effective:

"She passed and left no quiver in the veins, who  
now  
Moving among the trees, and clinging in the air  
she severed,

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10. See the next chapter.

Fanning the grass she walked on then, endures:  
Grey olive leaves beneath a rain-cold sky."

The last line is set off to give even greater stress to the unexpectedness of the image. In longer poems Pound found the technique useful in gathering together a number of lines of narrative and exposition into one apposite image:

"The salmon-trout drifts in the stream,  
The soul of the salmon-trout floats over the  
stream  
Like a little wafer of light.  
The salmon moves in the sun-shot, bright shallow  
sea....

As light as the shadow of the fish  
that falls through the water,  
She came into the large room by the stair,  
Yawning she came with the sleep still upon her.

'I am just from bed. The sleep is still in my eyes.  
'Come. I have had a long dream.'  
And I: 'That wood?  
'And two springs have passed us.'  
'Not so far, no, not so far now,  
There is a place - but no one else knows it -  
A field in a valley...  
Qu'ieu sui avinen,  
Ieu lo sai.'

She must speak of the time  
Of Arnaut de Mareuil, I thought; 'qu'ieu sui  
avinen.'

Light as the shadow of the fish  
That falls through the pale green water."

("Fish and the Shadow")

In some of his earlier Chinese' poems, too, Pound uses a modification of the hokku technique. A good example is the well-known "Liu Ch'e", which is very similar to "Gentildonna" quoted above, but is more beautiful in its building up of a series of suggestive images and the final super-position of an even more delicate one:

"The rustling of the silk is discontinued,  
Dust drifts over the court-yard,  
There is no sound of foot-fall, and the leaves  
Scurry into heaps and lie still,  
And she the rejoicer of the heart is beneath them:  
A wet leaf that clings to the threshold."

In "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley" Pound uses the technique

with success:

"Turned from the 'eau-forte  
Par Jaquemart'  
To the strait head  
Of Messalina:

'His true Penelope  
Was Flaubert,'  
And his tool  
The engraver's.

Firmness,  
Not the full smile,  
His art, but an art  
In profile;

Colourless  
Pier Francesca,  
Lacking the skill  
To forge Achaia."

("Mauberley 1920")

where the last stanza is the super-imposed image,  
qualifying the quality of Mauberley's art.

The above examples and his own criticism show that hokku made an important contribution to Pound's theory and practice. It confirmed what he had already been thinking in 1910; and prepared him for the reception of Fenollosa's theories regarding the nature of the Chinese ideograph and its advantages for poetry. One can also see how, on coming into contact with Fenollosa's notes on the Noh, Pound broadened the definition of the Image to mean also the unifying image which is one of the flexible binding devices in the Cantos.

BASIS: 'THE LONG VORTICIST POEM'

"We work in pure spirit,  
said Umewaka Minoru."

(Fenollosa: Diary.)

Vorticism was intended to be the answer to the Amygists and other diluters of Imagisme, who stopped short at the printed words in "A Few Don'ts" and did not trouble to find out the full implications of Pound's propositions. He formulated the creed of the new school together with Gaudier-Brzeska, Wadsworth, and Wyndham Lewis in their short-lived magazine BLAST. The name was chosen to denote a basis which would be equally applicable to all the arts. "Obviously," said Pound, "you cannot have 'cubist' poetry or 'imagist' painting." The basis was intensity:

"Vorticism is art before it has spread itself into flaccidity, into elaboration and secondary applications." 1

When the principles laid down by the Vorticists are examined, it may be seen that they are not very much more than a re-affirmation of the points raised by Imagisme, and the wild violence of the BLAST coterie seems a little out of place.

There were two main points in the school's prospectus which are worth noting. The first was the question of the 'moving image'; the Amygists lacked the intelligence to foresee the danger inherent in the Imagiste technique. Taken on the surface, the latter demanded that the Image be presented to the mind's eye without superfluous words, and without the opposite danger of presenting merely a pretty noise.

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1. Gaudier-Brzeska, A Memoir. p.102.



poetry into a society which could treat all the arts. It helped Pound to find a new sense of form, in that it enabled him to learn more about the modes of expression used by his colleagues, and to find a purer poetic way of setting down his emotions.

Asked if the Vorticist tenets admitted the writing of a long poem, he wrote

"The Japanese, who evolved the hokku, evolved also the Noh plays. In the best 'Noh' the whole play may consist of one image. I mean it is gathered about one image. Its unity consists in one image, enforced by movement and music. I see nothing against a long vorticist poem." 3

About the only merits of Pound's study of the Noh, the long vorticist poems, are the influence which that study had on Yeats' "Four Plays for Dancers", and this concept of the over-all image to which he feels it appropriate to refer images from any time and culture in the Cantos - which are 'a long vorticist poem.'

The translations which he made of the plays from Fenollosa's notes are possibly the least successful of all his translations. In his notes in Noh: or Accomplishment (1917), he said that he found the effort of trying to understand Noh "well worth the trial", and that as a form it was "unquestionably one of the great arts of the world." Yet in June 1918 he wrote to John Quinn and confessed

"...I find Noh unsatisfactory. I daresay it's all that could be done with the material. I don't believe anyone else will come along with a better book on Noh, save for encyclopaedizing the subject. And I admit there are beautiful bits in it. But it's all too damn soft. Like Pater, Fiona Macleod and James Matthew Barrie, not good enough." 4

It is possible to find out, without making an exhaustive investigation, just what caused this sudden volte-face.

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3. Gaudier-Brzeska, A Memoir. p.109.

4. The Letters of Ezra Pound, p.197.

Perhaps the very reconditiveness of Noh was responsible for Pound's insistence on its interest. There is a current impression held by many people that Pound's thought is not very much more than a helter-skelter chasing after this or that intriguing discovery, which tends to distort the continuous and essentially integrated quality of his artistic theory and his poetry. In Noh he found a new way of contemplating emotion, foreign to accepted European dramatic standards, and with his unceasing desire to 'make it new' he thought that a popularisation of Noh would help to increase the perception of Western dramatists.

The most striking characteristic of the form is, to one accustomed to the realism of European drama, its presentation of the essence of human experience rather than the setting-out and analysis of a given situation or problem. Since its ultimate refinement as a spectacle for the initiated nobility in the early 15th. Century, Noh has been based on Zen, a form of Buddhism which "conceives contemplation as the means of attaining freedom from the phenomenal world and achieving mystical insight into ultimate reality." 5 Fenollosa was told by his teacher in Noh, Umewaka Minoru, that

"...the excellence of Noh lay in emotion, not in action or externals. Therefore there were no accessories, as in the theatres. 'Spirit'...was the word he used. The pure spirit was what it worked in, so it was higher than other arts." 6

Where the Western theatre has regarded lack of scenery, inhibition of movement and characterisation, and the bare stage as restrictions on expression, Noh looks on these as positive artistic values. All

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5. "A Theatre of Beauty Without Tears", by Earle Ernst, Hudson Review vol.XI no.2. Summer 1958. p.263.  
6. The Translations of Ezra Pound. London, Faber, 1953. p.238. (Offset of Noh: or Accomplishment. Quoted passage is from Fenollosa's Diary, entry for Dec.20th, 1898.

attempts at literal representation in the latter form are rejected; the stage remains a stage; there is a single backcloth for all productions - its only decoration a single pinetree, the symbol of changelessness; and the stage is reached by a bridge which is in full view of the audience. The number of characters is restricted; there are usually only two important rôles - the shite and the waki, the principal character and the secondary one. Each of these may have 'followers', who are simply vocal extensions of the principals. The shite and the waki are not protagonist and antagonist, there being no conflict between them; they merely present the religious distillation of experience to its essence. The dialogue is sung and intoned in a chant; movement is restricted to a dance having prescribed symbolic meanings. The characters often take the part of the chorus - never, however, becoming in this rôle part of the action, as does the Greek chorus - and describe the scene or interpret the thoughts of the other characters. The classical method of production was the presentation of five or six pieces (each 'play' is very short) in a strict order. Some of the plays are detachable units complete in themselves, which are perfectly comprehensible to the initiated as single performances, while others are only intelligible when considered as part of a sequence. In many of the plays seemingly incomplete dialogue is complemented by significant dances or gestures. Fenollosa considered that the beauty and power of Noh lay in its concentration:

"All elements - costumes, motion, verse, and music - unite to produce a single clarified impression. Each drama embodies some primary human relation or emotion; and the poetic sweetness or poignancy of this is carried to its highest degree by carefully excluding all such obtrusive elements as a mimetic realism

or vulgar sensation might demand. The emotion is always fixed upon idea, not upon personality. The solo parts express great types of human character, derived from Japanese history. Now it is brotherly love, now love to a parent, now loyalty to a master....jealousy or anger....self-mastery in battle.....the clinging of a ghost to the scene of its sin, the infinite compassion of a buddha, the sorrow of unrequited love. Some one of these intense emotions is chosen for a piece, and, in it, elevated to the plane of universality by the intensity and purity of treatment. Thus the drama becomes a storehouse of history, and a great moral force for the whole social order of the Samurai."

7

Thus Noh was a new way, to Pound, of expressing the essential emotion. In its highly symbolic poetry and controlled, symbolic dances and gestures he saw a further application of his theory that "the perception of the intellect is given in the word, that of the emotions in the cadence." In its reconditeness, its stylised, metaphoric structure, he saw the need for intensive thought and study in order to appreciate its merits; and most of his literary criticism has been directed at getting his readers to pay close attention to whatever subject needed attentive thought.

"It is not, like our theatre, a place where every fineness and subtlety must give way; where every fineness of word or of word-cadence is sacrificed to the 'broad effect'; where the paint must be put on with a broom. It is a stage where every subsidiary art is bent precisely upon holding the faintest shade of a difference..."

8

In other words, what European drama lacked and what Noh had was emotional subtlety. Yeats found that the Noh dances in their ideal of beauty

"...unlike that of Greece and like that of pictures from Japan and China, makes them pause at moments of muscular tension. The interest is not in the human form but in the rhythm to which it moves, and the triumph of their art is to express the rhythm in its intensity."

9

But the structural device which most interested Pound

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7. Op.Cit. 'Fenollosa on the Noh'.

8. Ibid. p.124.

9. Essays by William Butler Yeats. London; MacMillan, 1924. (Preface to Certain Noble Plays of Japan, 1916.)

was, in a sense, the unity inherent in each play. He realised that the dance made up for the fact that many of the texts 'tail off into nothing' at the end; this was made good by the dance's final emotion, "for the Noh has its unity in emotion."

"It has also what we may call Unity of Image. At least, the better plays are all built into the intensification of a single image..." 10

Yeats was also struck by this point, and made use of it in his plays for dancers. Good examples of what he called "a playing upon a simple metaphor, as deliberate as the echoing rhythm of line in Chinese and Japanese painting" exist in the plays Nishikigi and Hagoromo. In the former play the ghosts of a man and woman, 'platonic' lovers in life, are given spiritual union by the prayers of a wandering priest. (Pound was much intrigued by those plays which made use of suspense caused by waiting for some supernatural manifestation - "if the Japanese authors had not combined the psychology of such matters with what is to me a very fine sort of poetry, I would not bother about it."<sup>11</sup>) The recurring image in Nishikigi is one of cloth woven from grass: the ghost of the girl carries around the 'Hosonuno', or coarse cloth, which she went on weaving when she should have opened the door to her lover in life; as ghosts, the lovers are "tangled up as the grass patterns are tangled in this coarse cloth"; but they are still apart -

"At last they forget, they forget.  
The wands are no longer offered,  
The custom is faded away.  
The narrow cloth of Kefu  
Will not meet over the breast.  
'Tis the story of Hosonuno,  
This is the talc:  
These bodies, having no weft,  
Even now are not come together..."

10. The Translations of Ezra Pound, p.237.

11. Ibid. p.236.

Before the priest is able to approach the tomb of the man, the couple spend the whole day until dusk "pushing aside the grass / From the overgrown way at Kefu"; the peasant whom they ask to guide them to the cave is cutting grass on the hill when they meet him; after the priest's prayer has united them, the ghost-bride says

"Hear soothsay,  
Now is there meeting between us,  
Between us who were until now  
In life and after-life kept apart.  
A dream-bridge over wild grass,  
Over the grass I dwell in."

And after their re-union the two appear momentarily -

"Look there to the cave  
Beneath the stems of the Suzuki.  
From under the shadow of the love-grass,  
See, see how they come forth and appear  
For an instant.....Illusion!"

In Hagoromo the 'unifying image' is a mantle of feathers: a passing fisherman sees the mantle hanging from a tree; it belongs to a Tennin, or aerial spirit, who demands its return. The fisherman gives it to her on condition that she perform the dance of the Tennin for him. In the play the mantle is coupled with the night sky, the flight of birds, the sweep of a rainstorm, and the passing of the seasons. In Kakitsubata irises recur throughout the piece: the spirit of a great lady identifies itself with the flower; it is taken as a symbol of the transience of earthly things; and in the end is identified with Buddha. "This intensification of the Image," said Pound in a note to the play Suma Genji (in which the image is one of blue-grey waves),

"...this manner of construction, is very interesting to me personally, as an Imagiste, for we Imagistes knew nothing of these plays when we set out in our own manner. These plays are also an answer to a question that has several times been put to me: 'Could one do a long Imagiste poem, or even a long poem in vers libre?'"



Compared with the second excerpt there is, in the Noh, a tangible sense of remoteness on the part of the translator; the idea behind the words is roughly similar in both passages, but it is expressed in the second with far more force and directness. One notices in Pound's references to Shakespeare that it is always the way of saying that is important to him; Shakespeare's dependence on words rather than on props and stage-devices. The Noh also depends on words, but the degree of symbolism on which the words in their turn depend is too great to hold the uninitiated, the man not brought up in the tradition, for very long. And when the words 'run out', the gestures and dances which add so much to the overall effect of the play are worthless to the reader, because they are not set down in detail on the page (of course, this disability applies only to the reader, who is not familiar with the produced play). For these reasons Pound left Noh for Chinese poetry and the ideogram -

"China is fundamental, Japan is not. Japan is a special interest...I don't mean to say there aren't interesting things in Fenollosa's Japanese stuff (or fine things, like the end of Kagekiyo, which is, I think, 'Homeric'). But China is solid....."

13

and Noh was "too damn soft." The most important 'interesting thing' as far as the development of his own poetry is concerned was Pound's adaptation of the 'Unifying image' <sup>14</sup> in his longer poems - especially in the Cantos - to express what had gone before in a different light, and to give a hint of what was to follow. It would be difficult to give an adequate example without quoting several cantos, but in No. 1V there occur two images which are used again and again throughout the whole sequence:

13. The Letters of Ezra Pound. p.155.

14. Vide Appendix A.

"And she went to the window and cast her down,  
    'All the while, the while, swallows crying:  
Ityn!  
    'It is Cabestan's heart in the dish.'  
    'It is Cabestan's heart in the dish?  
    'No other taste shall change this.'  
And she went to the window,  
            the slim white stone bar  
Making a double arch;  
Firm even fingers held to the firm pale stone:  
Swung for a moment,  
            and the wind out of Rhodéz  
Caught in the full of her sleeve."

This also recurs at the end of the same canto; the second image is met with even more frequently throughout the whole sequence:

"The dogs leap on Actaeon,  
    'Hither, hither, Actaeon,'  
Spotted stag of the wood;  
Gold, gold, a sheaf of hair,  
    Thick like a wheat swath,  
Blaze, blaze in the sun,  
    The dogs leap on Actaeon.  
Stumbling, stumbling along in the wood,  
Muttering, muttering Ovid:  
    'Pergusa...pool...pool...Gargaphia,  
'Pool, pool of Salmacis.'  
    The empty armour shakes as the cygnet  
    moves."

The 'super-position' technique of the hokku is also used in this last example. But the 'unifying image' had to be coupled with something else before Pound was able to use it well - with a stronger, more forceful language. He perfected this after he had fully assimilated the lessons contained in Fenollosa's Essay on the Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry.

FENOLLOSA AND CATHAY: THE METHOD.

"As our gardens have already been indebted to China for a few choice flowers, who knows but our poetry may some day lie under a similar obligation?"

(Sir John Davis: The Poetry of the Chinese. 1829.)

Fenollosa's Essay is not a bare philological discussion, but rather a study of the fundamentals of aesthetics, expressed in language not de-sensitised by centuries of philosophical argument, and using examples which have a stimulating novelty compared with those usually drawn from Western art - and with the added advantage of being indisputable at the time Pound received it simply because nobody was in a position to challenge them. In his laying bare of modes of thought and literary practice either forgotten or unrecognised in the West, he was a forerunner, albeit neglected, in the introduction of many principles which have since become fruitful in 'new' Western poetry. The criticism that he was a mere searcher after exotics is answered by this fact, and also by the Essay itself, in which he constantly compares Eastern and Western art and finds parallels between them. The exotic was to him a means of fructification, a storehouse of new ideas to be incorporated in the artistic renaissance which he hoped for in the West.

Two main points are treated in the Essay: the first is an indirect attack on the narrowness of English grammatical categories through an exposition of Chinese 'parts of speech' as compared with the

English; the second is an assessment of the metaphoric qualities and capabilities of the Chinese ideograph.

Fenollosa begins by pointing out that Chinese notation, far from being a congeries of arbitrary phonetic symbols, is based on a vivid shorthand picture of action, of the operations of nature. Isolated characters involve a verbal idea of action; they are not simply pictorial, but are shorthand representations of processes having a concrete verb quality:

"...the ideograph meaning to speak is a mouth with two words and a flame coming out of it. The sign meaning 'to grow up with difficulty' is grass with a twisted root." 1

In compound characters the quality is even more striking: the ideograph for a 'messmate' is a combination of the radicals for 'man' and 'fire'. In the process of compounding, two things are added together, not to produce a third, but to suggest a fundamental relation between them - which is, after all, the process of the essentially poetic device of metaphor. <sup>2</sup>

Examining the form of the sentence and ascertaining the power it adds to the verbal units from which it builds, Fenollosa disposes of the inadequate definition of a sentence as 'exposing a complete thought', and deals with the subjective theory that it 'unites a subject and a predicate' -

"The sentence according to this definition is not an attribute of nature but an accident of man as a conversational animal. If it were really so, then there could be no possible test of the truth of a sentence. Falsehood would be as specious as verity. Speech would carry no conviction. Of course this view of the grammarians springs from the...useless logic of the Middle Ages. According to this logic, thought deals with abstractions, concepts drawn out of things by a sifting process. These logicians never enquired how the 'qualities' which they pulled out of things came to be there...They despised the thing as a mere

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1. The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry. Washington, "Square Dollar Series". No date. Written before 1908.

2. Vide Appendix B.

'particular'...It was as if Botany should reason from the leaf-patterns woven into our tablecloths. Valid scientific thought consists in following as closely as may be the actual and entangled lines of forces as they pulse through things." 3

Ultimately, the sentence consists in the transference of force from an agent to an object; its units can be represented as Agent === Act === Object. It is a reproduction of an operation of nature, a reflection of the temporal order in causation, in which the act is the very substance of the fact denoted, and the agent and object simply limiting terms.

"Suppose we look out of a window and watch a man; suddenly he turns his head and actively fixes his attention upon something. We look ourselves and see that his vision has been focused upon a horse. We saw, first, the man before he acted; second, while he acted; third, the object toward which his action was directed. In speech we split up the rapid continuity of this action and of its picture into three essential parts or joints in the right order, and say:

Man        sees        horse." 4

The normal and typical sentence in English as well as in Chinese expresses just this process. The form of the transitive sentence corresponds exactly to this universal form of action in nature. Language is brought close to things. In inflected languages the natural order is absent, and words are given tags and labels to show which is the agent, which the object, and so on; in a detailed investigation of the function of intransitive verbs, the use of the copula 'is', and of the derivation of adjectives from verbs, Fenollosa shows that the utilisation of these forms in English and also the inflections in other Aryan languages are not more primitive than the transitive form, but result from alterations and modifications thereof dictated by difficulties experienced in direct articulation. 'Parts of speech' are essentially only what they do:

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3. Op.cit.pp.61-2.

4. Ibid. p.57.

"Frequently our lines of cleavage fail, one part of speech acts for another. They act for one another because they were originally one and the same."

5

The Chinese character represents both thing and action; pure nouns exist no more in the language than they do in nature. (Neither does a pure verb, an abstract motion.)

"Things are only the terminal points, or rather the meeting points, of actions, cross-sections cut through actions, snap-shots. The eye sees noun and verb as one: things in motion, motion in things, and so the Chinese conception tends to represent them."

6

With its strong reliance on verbs, its adherence to the order of natural succession, and its direct presentation, the Chinese language is highly poetic in form. Consider again the man seeing the horse:

"First stands the man on his two legs. Second, his eye moves through space: a bold figure represented by running legs under an eye, a modified picture of an eye, a modified picture of running legs, but unforgettable once you have seen it. Third stands the horse on his four legs.

人 見 馬

man

sees

horse

The thought-picture is not only called up by these signs as well as by words, but far more vividly and concretely. Legs belong to all three characters: they are alive. The group holds something of the quality of a continuous moving picture."

7

The likeness of form between Chinese and English sentences renders translation from one to the other comparatively easy. Fenollosa points out that it is frequently possible, by omitting English particles, to make literal-word-for-word translations which are not only intelligible in English but are moreover highly charged with poetic immediacy.<sup>8</sup> His key insight

5. Ibid. p.67.

6. Ibid. p.60.

7. Ibid. p.58.

8. Arthur Waley actually does this several times in his 170 Chinese Poems, but his concern is to convey

into the 'movement' in a given Chinese or English sentence - the charge transferred from subject to predicate - ties up with the natural order (of cause and effect) inherent in the transitive form. The force which these qualities give to Chinese poetry lead him to make a plea for the recognition of their potential in English poetry. (It is worth noting, too, how the 'movement' of the sentence fits in with Pound's doctrine of the moving image; the 'motion' of the latter is contained, ultimately, in the very word-to-word hustle of language itself. When inversions are used in English verse, the poem concerned necessarily loses much of its immediacy.)

Fenollosa asks for strict adherence to the concrete force of the ideas (= things = words) to be expressed, the use of strong and individual verbs wherever possible, and the eschewment of weak nouns, purely decorative adjectives and muddy intransitive forms.

"Poetry differs from prose in the concrete colors of its diction. It is not enough for it to furnish a meaning to philosophers. It must appeal to emotions with the charm of direct impression, flashing through regions where the intellect can only grope. Poetry must render what is said, not what is merely meant. Abstract meaning gives little vividness, and fullness of imagination gives all." 9

It is hardly worth the trouble to point out how richly this statement heralds Pound's theories of the

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the 'meaning' above all else, and in More Translations From The Chinese he goes so far as to apologise for it.

"Water's colour at-dusk still white;  
Sunset's glow in-the-dark gradually nil.  
Windy lotus shakes (like) broken fan;  
Wave-moon stirs (like) string (of) jewels.  
Crickets chirping answer one another;  
Mandarin-ducks sleep, not alone.  
Little servant repeatedly announces night;  
Returning steps still hesitate."

("Evening": More Translations.)

9. The Chinese Written Character, p.71. Pound's constant citation of Basil Bunting's discovery in a German-Italian dictionary of the equation of 'dichten' with 'condensare', and his definition of

the good Vorticist poem.

When he came to translate Chinese poetry Pound must have found this section of the Essay indispensable for understanding the poetic raw material which the Chinese language affords.<sup>10</sup> Coupled with the discussion on ideograph and metaphor, this exhibition of the Chinese character and sentence makes Fenollosa's Essay an enormously significant contribution to Pound's poetic theory and practice.

Turning from the presentation of actual visual actions, Fenollosa shows how the Chinese language with its peculiar materials deals with the unseen. To the Western mind, which believes that thought is concerned with logical categories and which rather condemns the faculty of direct imagination, it seems impossible that an intellectual fabric could be built up from mere picture-writing. Granted that the Chinese character and sentence are vivid pictures of actions and processes in nature, and that they embody true poetry as far as they go; but some additional grasp of the unseen is required. The best poetry deals not only with what is seen, but with spiritual suggestions and obscure relations which are hidden in processes too minute for vision, and in harmonies too large, in vibrations, cohesions and affinities. He demonstrates that Chinese compasses these by exactly the same processes which ancient races employed - by metaphor, which is the use of material images to suggest immaterial relations. Chinese etymology still retains the creative impulse and process. The lines of advance

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great literature as 'language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree' are in point.

10. Showing, on the philological side, a language in the course of modification by mental processes practically forgotten in the West, it also makes an extremely important contribution to the philosophy of language.

(metaphoric advance) are still shown, after thousands of years, and in many cases are retained in the meaning. The uses of a word in national philosophy and history, in biography and poetry, throw about it a nimbus of meanings which centre about the graphic symbol. The memory holds onto them and can still use them; they remain as reinforcing values with accumulation of meaning which languages based on a phonetic system can hardly hope to attain. Poetic language is always rich in overtones and natural affinities, but whereas in the West the accumulation of overtones in each word is usually perceptible only to the poet, in Chinese the visibility of the metaphor, which raises the poetic quality of the ideograph to an intense power, is universally appreciable. European languages derived a few hundred intensely vivid verbs, dealing directly with action, from Sanskrit - but the wealth of the speech grew from a natural piling-up of metaphor; Fenollosa insists that primitive metaphors did not spring from arbitrary subjective processes:

"They are possible only because they follow objective lines of relation in nature herself. Relations are more real and more important than the things which they relate....Had the world not been full of homologies, sympathies and identities, thought would have been starved and language chained to the obvious. There would have been no bridge whereby to cross from the minor truth of the seen to the major truth of the unseen."

11

Poetry deals with the concrete of nature, not with rows of separate 'particulars' - because such rows do not exist. "Poetry is finer than prose because it gives us more concrete truth in the same compass of words." Its chief device, metaphor, is, as Fenollosa indicates, at once the substance of nature and of language. "Poetry only does consciously what the

primitive races did unconsciously." (In Gaudier-Brzeska Pound was to say that "all poetic language is the language of exploration. Since the beginning of bad writing, writers have used images as ornaments. The point of Imagisme is that it does not use images as ornaments. The image is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language.") Metaphor is alien to a Cartesian sort of philosophy, which demands a process at once subjective and regardless of relations which are not implicit:

"According to this European logic thought is a kind of brickyard. It is baked into little hard units or concepts. These are piled in rows according to size and then labeled with words for future use. This use consists in picking out a few bricks, each by its convenient label, and sticking them together into a sort of wall called a sentence by the use either of white mortar for the copula 'is', or of black mortar for the negative copula 'is not'." 12

Illustrating his argument, Fenollosa shows that such logic has no way of bringing together any two concepts which do not happen to stand one under the other and in the same 'pyramid'; further, it cannot deal with any kind of interaction or with any multiplicity of function. He emphasises that the mind cannot know an abstraction which it has not itself made, and that it is impossible to put 'clear and distinct ideas' into someone else's head. European thought moves away from particulars to generalities, but the generalities which it eventually reaches are purely personal; the particulars which lead up to them are subjective and inaccessible to the comprehension of anyone but their formulator. Pound, following Fenollosa, describes the method:

"In Europe, if you ask a man to define anything, his definition always moves away from the simple things that he knows perfectly well, it recedes into an unknown region, that is a region

of remoter and progressively remoter abstraction. Thus if you ask him what red is, he says it is a 'colour'.

If you ask him what a colour is, he tells you it is a vibration or a refraction of light, or a division of the spectrum.

And if you ask him what vibration is, he tells you it is a mode of energy, or something of that sort, until you arrive at a modality of being, or non-being, or at any rate you get in beyond your depth, and beyond his depth." 13

The method of poetry, on the other hand, Fenollosa says, is "the method of science." Science discovers how "functions cohere in things." "She expresses her results in grouped sentences which embody no nouns or adjectives but verbs of a special character." Metaphor works in just this way; it interprets the obscure by assembling a sufficient phalanx of particulars, universally recognisable, and from them draws some illuminating correlation:

"(The Chinaman) is to define red. How can he do it in a picture that isn't painted in red paint? He puts (or his ancestor put) together the abbreviated pictures of

ROSE

CHERRY

IRON RUST

FLAMINGO

That, you see, is very much the kind of thing a biologist does (in a very much more complicated way) when he gets together a few hundred or thousand slides, and picks out what is necessary for his general statement. Something that fits the case, that applies in all of the cases.

The Chinese 'word' or ideogram for red is based on something everyone KNOWS." 14

The 'phalanx' has to be 'sufficient'; a single isolated 'thing' would furnish no reference-point at all. A man who had seen only one small rowing-boat could form no idea of 'boat' which would have any validity. The biologist collects a lot of particulars and from them draws an equation. He uses his equation, but he does not know it as he knows the particulars. The poet has to communicate intangibles: he collects particulars

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13. ABC of Reading. London; Faber & Faber, 1951.  
(2nd. ed.) p.19.

14. Ibid. p.22.

and from their juxtaposition, which furnishes some illuminating knowledge, he conveys his equation.<sup>15</sup> He does not 'know' the equation; the knowledge is in the particulars. The Chinese ideograph sets things in relation, and the reader can intuit the dynamics of the relation. The knowledge is in the 'things'; it is not in the actual picture. In each case objective apprehension is required.

English, which originally was rich in metaphor, has degenerated in a way that Chinese with its constantly visible etymology can not:

"Languages today are thin and cold because we think less and less into them. We are forced, for the sake of quickness and sharpness, to file down each word to its narrowest edge of meaning. ...We are content to accept the vulgar misuse of the moment." 16

Taking an example from Chinese, we should try to preserve the metaphoric overtones of English speech:

"We need in poetry thousands of active words, each doing its utmost to show forth the motive and vital forces. We cannot exhibit the wealth of nature by mere summation, by the piling of sentences. Poetic thought works by suggestion, crowding maximum meaning into the single phrase pregnant, charged, and luminous from within." 17

Fenollosa finishes the Essay without proclaiming 'the method' as a method, but it is clear what he intended. The ideograph as a means of transmission and registration of thought he sees as an answer to the barrenness resulting from the 'subjective' method of abstraction. A language written in the 'ideogrammic' way simply has to stay poetic, whereas a column of English type might very well not. In using ideogram the writer is driven to select for juxtaposition those words whose overtones blend into a lucid harmony;

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15. Cf. Pound: "Poetry is an equation for the human emotions..."

16. Essay on the Chinese Written Character, p.74.

17. Ibid. p.78.

Pound jumped at the idea and applied it to all spheres of his work. It must be understood that Fenollosa did not intend it merely as a way to overhaul diction, and that Pound did not make the easy mistake of accepting it as such. To narrow the application of the ideogram would have resulted in little more than a propensity for fine picturesque phrases; for full success the method as advocated by Fenollosa had to be applied to the organisation of the work in its entirety, whether it were a poem, a textbook, an arrangement of paintings in a gallery, or a concert. Unfortunately, most of the examples of the Poundian application of the ideogrammic method fall outside the scope of this thesis as they were written after 1920,<sup>18</sup> but this is no excuse for failing to note the central significance of the Essay. Without a knowledge of its contribution to his theory and practice the critic of the Poundian technique is helpless; it remains possibly the most important extraneous piece of material in the Pound canon. It forms the ground plan of the structure of the Cantos; a recognition of the 'method' is essential to the comprehension of Guide to Kulchur (1938) where ideogram is applied to a whole civilisation, and various foci of interest are presented in contact with as many others as possible and where the topics recur again and again but never with the same neighbours; it is essential to an appreciation of ABC of Reading (1934), where texts are presented in juxtaposition and the reader is left to make observations on why they occur at all. The method is used in ABC of Economics (1934),

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18. Pound edited the Essay in 1919; it appeared first in Instigations. (1920). The earliest reference to it in his letters occurs in late 1916, when he wrote of it as being "on verbs." Clearly the full import of the work and its potentialities only struck him at a later date.

where C.H. Douglas's Social Credit theories are placed next to Pound's views of contemporary monetary abuses. It is also used in Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (1920), where short vignettes, apparently unrelated, are juxtaposed without comment.

It might with justification be asked why Pound alludes to the method as 'ideogrammic' and not as 'metaphoric', since for him ideogram and metaphor are in essence the same. He acknowledges this himself. In the wider context in which he used it, it does of course consist in using concatenations of metaphor to isolate, define, and compare qualities; but even still, it is metaphoric in application. The answer lies in the modern conception of metaphor; the term has come to be equated with connotations of refinement and decoration - it is no longer seen as a device which isolates and presents essentials, but as a 'dressing-up' of some otherwise ordinary thought. The new term, ideogram, avoids the implications of abstraction and of exoticism, and permits the stressing of function and structure. In making his ideogram, the poet is as 'impersonal' as the scientist. The important thing here, as everywhere else, is for Pound the technique.

One way of assessing the poems in Cathay (1915) is to ascertain how far Pound applied Fenollosa's hints on the translation of Chinese poetry to his own efforts, to see how much he relies on concrete, active verbs, preserving metaphoric overtones, and the rest. This becomes easy when the poems are compared with translations of the same originals by widely-read and respected sinologues such as Arthur Waley and Herbert

Giles. Of course, without a first-hand knowledge of the originals, it is impossible to judge how closely the translator sticks to the tone of the old works, but this apparent stumbling-block becomes insignificant when the new poems are considered as poems in their own right. Eliot has said of Pound that "he is the inventor of Chinese poetry for our time." When a successful rendering of a foreign poem is encountered - successful in its resolution into the living idiom of the new language - the reader tends to think that the rendering is perfectly translucent, that the new poem is a faithful carrying-over of the old. Eliot points out that "the Elizabethans must have thought that they got Homer through Chapman, Plutarch through North." To modern readers, however, Chapman's Homer and North's Plutarch are rather seen as specimens of Tudor writing. In the same way Pound's translations - and not only those from the Chinese - seem to contemporary readers to be 'translucencies'. In time to come they will be regarded as specimens of XXth. Century poetry. "People of today who like Chinese poetry are really no more liking Chinese poetry than the people who like Willow pottery and Chinesische-Turms in Munich and Kew like Chinese art."<sup>19</sup> Clearly, then, what makes people think that a translation is really a perfect restatement of the original is the 'feel', the stimmung, which it communicates. And a good translation achieves this communication by tone; the tone itself is a result of the poet's wrestle with language. If he has the ability to use his language to make a new form, similar in effect to that of the original, and in doing so extends the bounds of his language and its poetic

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19. p.15 of Eliot's introduction to his edition of Selected Poems of Ezra Pound. London; Faber & Gwyer, 1928. Re-issued by Faber & Faber 1948.

capabilities, then his poem will be the better; if he simply translates into something already existing in his language, then the tone will necessarily be hackneyed; it will not fulfil its potential, and the poem will be the poorer - as a translation-poem, in the first sense, and in the second as a poem in itself.

Two versions of a poem by Mei Shêng illustrate this point well. Dr. Giles's translation runs:

"Green grows the grass upon the bank,  
The willow-shoots are long and lank;  
A lady in a glistening gown  
Opens the casement and looks down.  
The roses on her cheeks blush bright  
Her rounded arm is dazzling white;  
A singing-girl in early life,  
And now a careless roué's wife.....  
Ah, if he does not mind his own,  
He'll find someday the bird has flown!"

("Neglected")

The publishers of the volume in which this appears say in a prefatory note that "Dr. Giles's work is in a free rhythmical style....(he gives) us an excellent interpretation of the best Chinese poems. A comparison of Dr. Giles's "excellent interpretation" and "free rhythmical style" with Pound's rendering is instructive:

"Blue, blue is the grass about the river  
And the willows have overfilled the close garden.  
And within, the mistress, in the midmost of her  
youth,  
White, white of face, hesitates, passing the door.  
Slender, she puts forth a slender hand;  
  
And she was a courtesan in the old days,  
And she has married a sot,  
Who now goes drunkenly out  
And leaves her too much alone."

("The Beautiful Toilet")

Giles's version is so deep in the English tradition that it might very well be taken for a badly-written Victorian imitation of some ballad-form. It is done with no poetic feeling at all, and the antithesis of the two conflicting moods in the poem is missed altogether. His poem is crammed with stilted clichés.

The sickening playfulness of the last couplet deprives the work of any pretence of poignancy whatever.<sup>20</sup> Pound, on the other hand, catches the mood very well. The first stanza of his poem depends for its descriptive effect on long, heavily-consonanted lines and repetition of adjectives (the latter is, incidentally, a feature of the original), as well as on precise statement. In the second stanza the voice changes completely to a series of short, incisive statements which build up to a hint of the possible break-up of the marriage. Giles destroys the essentially suggestive mood by bringing in a pointless 'Ah!' and by hammering home a hackneyed moralising idiomatic expression.

In another poem by Li Po this difference in approach is again visible. Pound approaches the job of translation with the intention of paying the original author the compliment of imitating his images and catching his mood; Giles (and most of the others) bend and twist the original to fit old accepted 'poetic' modes of expression. To them, the Chinese has nothing new in the way of imagery or technique to offer; the poems exist to be shoved into some restricting medium which must be as traditionally English as possible. For Pound, each original is by hypothesis something new, and consequently he tries to make a new form in English. He never translates into something already existing in the language. With reference to the poem discussed above, the following extract from a letter written in 1917 is interesting:

"The subject is Chinese, the language of the translations is mine - I think. At least if you compare... 'The Beautiful Toilet' with the same poem in Giles' Chinese Literature, you will be

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20. The poem is printed in Select Chinese Verses, translated by Herbert A. Giles and Arthur Waley. Shanghai, The Commercial Press, 1934.

able to gauge the amount of effect the celestial Chinese has on the osseous head of an imbecile or a philologist." 21

There is the core of the difference; Pound is first and last a poet, while Giles, Waley and Fletcher are first and last sinologists with little or no poetic feeling, and a purely hit-or-miss poetic technique:

"Athwart the northern gate the green hills swell.  
White water round the eastern city flows.  
When once we here have made a long farewell,  
Your lone sail struggling up the current goes.  
These floating clouds are like the wanderer's  
heart.  
Yon sinking sun recalls departed days.  
Your hand waves us adieu; and lo! you start,  
And dismally your horse retiring neighs." 22

Pound's translation:

"Blue mountains to the north of the walls,  
White river winding about them;  
Here we must make separation  
And go out through a thousand miles of dead grass.  
Mind like a floating wide cloud,  
Sunset like the parting of old acquaintances  
Who bow over their clasped hands at a distance.  
Our horses neigh to each other  
as we are departing."

The economy of the latter version is apparent. The difference in imagery in the first part - Fletcher's of a lonely boat on the river, Pound's of a lonely journey through dead grass - is probably due to the fact that Fenollosa's texts, with the decipherings of the Japanese Professors Mori and Ariga attached, were defective. What is significant is the clarity of Pound's presentation of the leave-taking, in comparison with the tortured syntax of Fletcher. Pound simply presents the images and lets the reader do the rest, while Fletcher has to explain each reference. The artificiality of "and lo!", and the clumsy inversion in the last line are poetic faults which should have been avoided.<sup>23</sup> To sinologists they are, no doubt,

21. The Letters of Ezra Pound, p.154.

22. More Gems of Chinese Poetry. W.J.Fletcher. Shanghai; The Commercial Press, 1934.

23. See also Appendix B for a further example of an 'accepted' poem by Fletcher compared with one by Pound.

preferable to Pound's occasional misreadings of characters and his omission of explanatory adjectives and feeble footnotes. In the Criterion for April 1938, a Chinese expert, Hsieh Wen Tung, surveyed "English Translations of Chinese Poetry" and found Pound "the only one who, uninhibited by tradition, moulds his style on the text."

"The one translator who makes no...concessions to the reader as to substitute explanation for implication or insert extraneous information is Mr. Ezra Pound."

Without doubt it was the discipline Pound learned from his Imagiste and Vorticist writing that permitted this restraint; as before, as in Ripostes and Lustra, the images are stated and then left severely alone. Compare two versions of another poem by Li Po:

"Phoenixes that played here once, so that the place  
was named for them,  
Have abandoned it now to this desolate river;  
The paths of Wu palace are crooked with weeds;  
The garments of Chin are ancient dust.  
...Like the green horizon halving the Three Peaks,  
Like this island of White Egrets dividing the  
river,  
A cloud has risen between the Light of Heaven and  
me,  
To hide his city from my melancholy heart."

(Witter Bynner: "On Climbing in  
Nanking to the Terrace of Phoenixes")

"The phoenix are at play on their terrace.  
The phoenix are gone, the river flows on alone.  
Flowers and grass  
Cover the dark path  
where lay the dynastic house of the Go.  
The bright cloths and bright caps of Shin  
Are now the base of old hills.  
The Three Mountains fall through the far heaven,  
The isle of White Heron  
splits the two streams apart.  
Now the high clouds cover the sun  
And I cannot see Choan afar  
And I am sad."

(Cathay)

Hsieh points out that Bynner has in the first line inserted an explanatory detail; in the second, replaced the Chinese formal parallelism with the English

grammatical form; in the fifth and sixth added the unjustifiable 'like this'; and in the last couplet arbitrarily turned a semi-symbolic statement into a metaphoric one. Pound has not, and his poem is closer to the original in tone and intention. Bynner's poem loses most of its force because he insists on using weak copulas and on avoiding active verbs. Pound's has a concentration of movement and suggestion because he does use strong verbs. There are no superfluous words; his style is not that of the 'tradition' but is essentially uninhibited by it - and therein lies the secret. It is Imagiste poetry, its method is phanopoeia:

"...the maximum of phanopoeia (throwing a visual image on the mind) is probably reached by the Chinese, due in part to their particular kind of written language.....

I once got a man to start translating the Seafarer into Chinese. It came out almost directly into Chinese verse, with two solid ideograms in each half-line. Apart from the Seafarer I know no other European poems of the period that you can hang up with the 'Exile's Letter' of Li Po, displaying the West on a par with the Orient."

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It will be remembered that Pound published his translation of The Seafarer in 1912. The Anglo-Saxon kenning is the verbal equivalent of the Chinese ideograph.

In discussing Giles's "Neglected" and Pound's "The Beautiful Toilet" earlier in the chapter, it was shown how the former writer was unable to convey the peripeteia of the last part of the poem because of his insensitive insistence on dragging the Chinese into a stereotyped English form. In most of the poems in Cathay a good deal of the effect depends on the rendering of this peripeteia. Good examples of the alteration of tone which make it are found in "The

River Merchant's Wife: A Letter" (quoted in full in Appendix B) and in "Poem by the Bridge at Ten-Shin":

"But today's men are not the men of the old days,  
Though they hang in the same way over the bridge  
rail...  
.....Haughty their passing,  
Haughty their steps as they go in to great  
banquets,  
To high halls and curious food,  
To the perfumed air and girls dancing,  
To clear flutes and clear singing;.....  
...Night and day are given over to pleasure  
And they think it will last a thousand autumns,  
Unwearying autumns.  
For them the yellow dog howls portents in vain,  
And what are they compared to the lady Riokushu,  
That was the cause of hate!  
Who among them is a man like Han-rei  
Who departed alone with his mistress,  
With her hair unbound, and he his own skiffsman!"

It is flexibility of tone which enables the language to enforce the alteration of voice. Pound's grounding in the Troubadours, in Heine, in the French poets is evident in Cathay just as much as the techniques which he learned from Anglo-Saxon and Imagisme. The polish which Cathay gave his work shines to advantage in Mauberley and Propertius, where Pound's skill in tonal workmanship is at its peak.

TRANSLATION: THINKING IN ACCURATE TERMS.

"You hate translation???  
What of it?? Expect to  
be carried up Mt. Helicon  
in an easy chair?"

(Letters)

Before considering Propertius and Mauberley, the peaks of Pound's early poetry, it is necessary to survey his translation-poetry. Much of his reputation rests upon his translations, but this side of his work is usually considered in an isolated position, quite apart from his other writing. It is difficult to see why this procedure is followed, because the translations and the principles Pound evolved in making them form an integral part of his poetic progress, and play a very considerable rôle in the development of his theories of technique.

Many critics censure the translations severely.<sup>1</sup> They fail to see, or perhaps they prefer to ignore, the fact that there are two standpoints from which to view the achievements of the translator of verse; from the one, their views are, of course, correct; but from the other, which is earning wider recognition as the more valid, their objections fail.

There are two hypothetical extremes in the art of verse-translation. At one pole the translator attempts to convey some particular quality or meaning of the original by finding words in the new language whose denotations are as close as possible to those of the original. This method demands almost categorically that everything in the original outside that quality to be conveyed - tone, feeling, associations, beauty and so forth, if it be the meaning that the translator is

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1. Inter alia Robert Graves, Gilbert Highet, Martin Gilkes.

after - should be ignored. The required quality is carried over, not only at the cost of everything else in the original, but very often at the cost of everything else in the new language. The deplorable cribs of Greek and Roman classics fed to schoolboys are deplorable because of this fault; in attempting to convey the meaning 'at all costs' the translators fail to make use of the resources of English and besides obscuring the sense, perpetrate versions which are phrased, as Eliot said bitterly of Gilbert Murray's Euripides, in language more impenetrable than the original. In addition, or rather consequently, the versions are boring in the extreme. Also in this category are the translations which try to imitate literally certain rhyme- and rhythm-schemes practically unfeasible in the new language, which, in order to obtain the desired effect, is strained and tortured into ludicrous arrangements of stress and syntax.<sup>2</sup> There is an appreciable difference in the field of translation between 'literality' and 'fidelity' which is unfortunately not universally recognised.

At the other pole, opposing the word-for-word type of translation, is the version which is not so much a translation as an adaptation. Here the original is used rather as a sort of paradigm, a source of suggestion for a work relatively independent of it. Instead of demanding strict adherence to one quality of the original, the translator produces a poem for a poem; the obvious danger is that he might intrude too much of himself into his product. Much criticism would be avoided if it were made clear that the new poem were being presented as a 'variation on a theme';

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2. Cf. Untermeyer's translations of Heine.

titles mislead many critics. .

The ideal poetic translation would exist midway between the two extremes, between the pedantry which insists that the significance of an emotion or a thought lies in the notation someone else found for it, and the substitution for one poem of another carrying overtones of the original. It would presumably attempt to discover and order not only the words but - broadly - the terms in which the original work could be made to exist most fully and most faithfully in the living language into which it is translated. (Clearly this demands, on the translator's part, a thorough knowledge of the ambience of the original before he can hope to render the atmosphere. A good example of this sort of translation-poetry is Basil Bunting's "Villon"; Marcel Granet's translations of the poems in the Shih Ching would fall in this group as well, if he had shown any poetic sensibility at all in making them.<sup>3</sup>) The original would be re-created by the use of whatever live poetic means the new language has to offer. But the original poem is, in a sense, static; and it is because of this fact that no translation can ever be perfect, can ever be to the new language just what the original was to the old, nor exist in the new culture in the same terms as the other did in the old. As Rossetti had it in the preface to his Early Italian Poets, "...these possess in their degree beauties of a kind which can never again exist in art." While acknowledging this fact, genuine translation does something compensatory to its original: it 'forms its life in the new time.' It does not only rejuvenate the

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3. Basil Bunting Poems 1950. New York; Kasper & Horton. Festivals and Songs of Ancient China. Marcel Granet. London; George Routledge & Sons, 1932.

new language by forcing the translator to search for new words, significant idioms, new ways of expressing old thoughts and so forth, but it extends the possibilities of poetic speech in the new language by giving it forms and applications which it would otherwise probably not have engendered.

Pound's translations are of all three types. They range from the pedagogical transcriptions in The Spirit of Romance to the poems in Cathay discussed in the last chapter, and the much-maligned Homage to Sextus Propertius.

The Provençal translations are among the best known of all Pound's poems, and a study of his poetic progress as shown therein could furnish enough material for a thesis in its own right. The earliest exhibits were just that - exhibits, introducing Provençal poetry to a new public. Each one was chosen to show some technical virtuosity: rhyme-scheme, melopoeia, rhythm and the like. I have said that Pound's own technique developed as he continued translating the songs: there is considerable difference in treatment between his rendering of Arnaut Daniel in The Spirit of Romance (1910) and later attempts at the same poems in Instigations, which was published in 1920. But while many of the translations are good poems in themselves, it is on the whole true to say that they do not measure up to the excellence of the Cathay sequence; which is not to support Gilbert Highet's rather stupid assertion:

"unable to think, but ready to quote and paraphrase  
in six languages  
including Provençal  
ei didl didl  
li chat ei li fidl  
it took a man like Ezra to kill Provençal  
poetry for us....."

Pound set out to "resuscitate the dead art of the lyric" in English verse. He believed that the true art of singing had, in effect, died out with Chaucer; Shakespeare, as a lyric technician, was indebted to the Italian song-books, which were at that time already "exotic"; isolated singers ( Herrick, Campion, Waller) fanned the dying spark, but after them the art of weaving word and music was dormant. Provençal poetry had, like the work of the Melic poets, attained a high rhythmic and metrical brilliance because "each thing done by the poet had some definite musical urge or necessity bound up with it." <sup>4</sup> Unlike Melic poetry it was written in a relatively uninflected language, one just breaking away from Latin labels and much closer in structure to English. So Pound investigated troubadour poetry:

"One might almost say that the whole culture of the age, at any rate the mass of the purely literary culture of the age, from 1050 to 1250 and on till 1300, was concentrated on one aesthetic problem, which as Dante put it, 'includes the whole art.'

That 'whole art' consisted in putting together about six strophes of poesy so that the words and the tune should be welded together without joint and without wem." 5

The greater part of Pound's work in Provençal is given over to Arnaut Daniel, Dante's 'miglior fabbro'. He appealed to Pound because he had been an innovator - highest in Pound's list of 'best poets'. He had foreseen the sonnet, invented the sestina, and, pace all supporters of Surrey, started a form of blank verse in his "Sols Sui":

"Sols sui qui sai lo sobrafan quem sortz  
Al cor d'amor sofren per sobramar,  
Car mos volers es tant fermes et entiers  
C'anc no s'esduis de celliei ni s'estors  
Cui encubric al prim vezer e puois:

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4. "The Tradition", in Poetry, Dec. 1913. Reprinted in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, p.91.  
5. ABC of Reading, p.53.

Qu'ades ses lieis dic a lieis cochos motz  
Pois quan le vei non sai, tant, l'ai, que dire..."

In the De Vulgari Eloquentia Dante cites this canzone among the models of most excellent construction. The rhymes a, b, c, d, e, f, and g are repeated in the same order six times, with a coda e, f, g. "The original is one of the most musical arrangements of words in sequence to be found," said Pound in The Spirit of Romance, "I mean in applying an international standard." His prose version in the same book runs

"I am the only one who knows the over-anguish which falls to my lot, to the heart of love suffering through over-love; for my desire is so firm and whole, never turning away or twisting from her, whom I desired at first sight and since, so that now without her I say to her hot words, since when I see her I do not know, having so much, what to say."

In Instigations a long essay on Daniel appeared, and a poetic translation of the above stanza runs

"I only, and who elrische pain support,  
Know out love's heart o'er borne by overlove,  
For my desire that is so firm and straight  
And unchanged since I found her in my sight  
And unturned since she came within my glance,  
That far from her my speech springs up aflame;  
Near her comes not. So press the words to arrest :  
it."

But poetic innovation was not what Pound wanted to show his readers; as always, technique was the paramount attraction. Daniel, in comparison to other poets of the time, realised that the music of rhymes depends not on their multiplicity but on their arrangement. Most of his canzoni build up a broad musical structure by rhyming lines from stanza to stanza rather than within a given stanza. He also avoided conventional phrases, preferring exact, precise wording. In "Can Chai la Fueilla" another skill is apparent; his mastery of rhythm:

"Can chai la fueilla  
dels ausors entrecims,

El freitz s'ergueilla  
                  don sechal vais' el vims,  
Dels òus refrims  
                  vei sordezir la brucilla;  
Mas ieu soi prins  
                  d'amor, qui que s'en tueilla."

It is impossible to appreciate the changing rhythm of the whole without giving the entire poem, but this first stanza shows how a swinging effect is produced with the simple device of caesurae. Pound's version catches the rhythm:

"When sere leaf falleth  
                  from the high forkèd tips,  
And cold appalleth  
                  dry osier, haws and hips,  
Coppice he strips  
                  of bird, that now none calleth.  
Fordel my lips  
                  in love have, though he galleth."

'Fordel', Pound explains in a footnote, means 'pre-eminence.' Obviously it is only an estimate of Daniel's technical skill which can be obtained from Pound's translations; for a more accurate assessment one has to study the original Provençal. However, a fair idea of his vividness and delicacy may be inferred from the first part of "L'aura amara". In this poem he reproduces the sounds of birds singing in autumn, using onomatopoeia which depends on the '-utz', 'letz', '-ecs', and '-ortz' of the rhyme scheme. They are what Dante called shaggy rhymes, and it is impossible to reproduce them with much more than a fair degree of accuracy in English:

"L'aura amara  
Fals bruoills brancutz  
Clarzir  
Quel doutz espeissa ab fuoills,  
Els letz  
Becs  
Dels auzels ramencs  
Ten balps e mutz  
Pars  
E non-pars;  
Per qu'eu m'esfortz  
De far e dir  
Plazers  
A mains per liei

Que m'a virat bas d'aut,  
Don tem morir  
Sils afans no m'asoma."

This verse form is repeated six times with exact repetition of the rhymes. Pound first translated it as follows:

"The bitter air strips clear the forked boughs,  
Which softer winds had covered thick with leaves,  
And holdeth dumb and stuttering the birds' glad  
mouths  
Amid the boughs, mates and unmated all.  
Wherefore I struggle to speak and do more often  
such things as please her who hath cast me down  
from on high, of whom I fear to die unless she  
ease my pain."

He might as well have kept the whole thing in prose.

In 1920 he produced a verse translation which paralleled the rhyme-scheme but, like the other translations, made use of a very 'literary' diction.<sup>6</sup> Pound realised that his versions were not likely to be regarded as great examples of XXth. Century poetry; but they were all that could be expected:

"The translations are a makeshift; it is not to be expected that I can do in ten years what it took two hundred troubadours a century and a half to accomplish...for the extenuation of the language of my verses, I would point out that the Provençals were not constrained by the modern literary sense. Their restraints were the tune and rhyme-scheme, they were not constrained by a need for certain qualities of writing, without which no modern poem is complete or satisfactory...Their triumph...is in an art between literature and music; if I have succeeded in indicating some of the properties of the latter I have also let some of the former go by the board. It is quite possible that if the troubadours had been bothered about style, they would not have brought their blend of word and tune to so elaborate a completion." 7

The purpose of these translations was to show the technical skill of Daniel, as I have said; but if Pound had not printed the original Provençal alongside his versions, the end would very nearly have been defeated. The exhibits in The Spirit of Romance do little more than give the meaning of the words; they

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6. Vide Appendix C.

7. "Arnaut Daniel", in Instigations. Reprinted in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, pp.116-7.

surrender any 'texture-meaning', and the later poems in Instigations too often lack the precision which is a feature of the original.

In "Langue d'Oc" the translations are more free, and Pound achieves the 'music and ease' with more success; but there are still faults. In Guilhelm de Poitieu's "Avril" he departs from the strict rhyme-scheme, and fails to stick to the pattern of the original; the first stanza,

"When the springtime is sweet  
And the birds repeat  
Their new song in the leaves,  
'Tis meet  
A man go where he will."

has little structural similarity to the last:

"I care not for their clamour  
Who have come between me and my charmer,  
For I know how words run loose,  
Big talk and little use.  
Spoilers of pleasure,  
We take their measure."

There is an appearance of sameness in the stanza lengths and in the line variants, but the poem is without a comprehensive plan. Progress is apparent in Giraut de Bornelh's "Alba"; the first translation follows the Provençal in metre, phrasing and convention, but the second is far less contrived: Pound uses a more direct, colloquial language, and re-arranges lines here and there, imparting a greater vitality to the poem.

However, there are still palpable faults: the metre is inconstant, in the fifth stanza Pound switches the viewpoint to help his rhyme, and the very freshness, the directness of speech which lifts this version above the first attempt is responsible for the loss of anonymity, and thus dream-quality, in the envoi. <sup>8</sup>

In "Planh for the Young English King" he takes liberties with the original, but justifies

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8. Vide Appendix C.

them by working out a compensatory plan. He makes no attempt to follow the difficult rhyme-scheme, but finds vowel-sounds appropriate to the dirge-like rhythm of the lines. The language is archaic, but whereas this was a fault in the poems in Personae and Exultations it is far from being one here. In the early volumes the feeling of the poems was 'modern'; in the "Planh" the feeling is archaic, and so an archaic mode of speech is more suitable than not.<sup>9</sup> An anonymous Alba printed at the beginning of "Langue d'Oc" is a good example of Pound's maturation in that it shows his realisation that the English versions had to have a self-contained integrity if they were to succeed. It also shows how he had gained confidence in applying to his work the very skills which the troubadours used. The original rhymes the first three lines, the next two, and the last two - three rhymes in all; Pound re-orders the rhyme-scheme, introduces a new note (substituting for the Provençal 'drutz' = lover, the word 'rascal'), and effects a more lilting rhythm by breaking up the last line:

"Quan lo rossinhols escria  
Ab sa par la nueg e'l dia,  
Ieu sui ab ma bell' amia  
    Jos la flor,  
Tro la gaita de la tor  
Escria: drutz, al levar!  
Qu'ieu vei l'alba e'l jorn clar."

"When the nightingale to his mate  
Sings day-long and night-late  
My love and I keep state  
In bower,  
In flower,  
Till the watchman on the tower  
Cry:  
    'Up! Thou rascal, Rise,  
    I see the white  
        Light  
        And the night  
            Flies.'"

In the "Descant on a Theme by Cerclamon" he changes

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9. Ibid.

the rhyme-scheme and re-arranges the stanzas. The poems in Canzoni (1911) are for the most part attempts to graft Provençal conventions onto English verse, and for the most part they fail because Pound strains the rhythms and rhymes, and uses a very Victorian diction. But "Na Audiart", "Cino", and "Sestina: Altaforte", which are also written in troubadour style, are far more successful. They are the fruit of Pound's Provençal studies and exercises. His 'assaults' on Provence may be categorised into two rough groups: the purely heuristic studies of verse-forms and techniques, as in the Daniel work, and the Browningsque use of Provençal subject-matter - trying to do as Browning had done with Renaissance Italy - to make some of his most well-known personae. They progress from rather crude attempts at conveying the music, to a somewhat bare competency in bringing over the meaning of the words in the originals, and finally give rise to brilliant poems using word- and rhythm-music which owe their existence to troubadour precedent but which are Pound's and his alone. "Near Perigord" is a fine example.

The Cavalcanti translations are to all intents echoes of the Daniel studies; Pound picks out facets which show that Tuscan poetry at its best used words with an almost scholastic precision - terms which were in common use in philosophical language and which had metaphysical connotations. Cavalcanti wove them together with a verbal music to give 'a language beyond words'; his poetry and that of Dante represents, in Pound's view, the last peak of the fusion of "motz el son" which was soon to give way to Petrarchan ornament. Pound's erstwhile Professor wrote to him in 1922, criticising the Provençal and Tuscan translations as

'romantic'; he replied that the romanticism did not interest him, but the fact that Guido and Arnaut were "psychological, almost physiological, diagnosticians" did. In Guido the 'figure', the strong metamorphic or 'picturesque' expression exists to convey or to interpret a definite meaning. In Petrarch it is ornament, the prettiest ornament he could find - but not an irreplaceable ornament.

"When the late T.E. Hulme was trying to be a philosopher...and fussing about Sorel and Bergson and getting them translated into English, I spoke to him one day of the difference between Guido's precise interpretative metaphor, and the Petrarchan fustian and ornament, pointing out that Guido thought in accurate terms; that the phrases correspond to definite sensations undergone; Hulme took some time over it in silence, and then finally said: 'That is very interesting'; and after a pause: 'That is more interesting than anything I ever read in a book.'" 10

Logopoeia, the dance of the intellect among words, was what Pound thought worth study in Guido's poetry; that and melopoeia - his translation of Guido's Donna Mi Priegha (included in what is possibly one of the most detailed and scholarly studies of a short poem to be made for a very long time) has a dedicace: "To Thomas Campion his ghost, and to the ghost of Henry Lawes, as prayer for the revival of music." The translation itself is too long to quote, but is perhaps one of the best examples of combined melopoeia and logopoeia that Pound has ever written.

It would take a book to assess all Pound's translations. The Chinese poems I have already dealt with, and the Homage to Sextus Propertius is discussed in the next; I have already mentioned the translations and adaptations from Heine. The Silver Latin poets found a chapter in The Spirit of Romance

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10. "Cavalcanti". Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, p.162. Reprinted from Make It New, 1934. Pound dates the essay 1910-1931.

alongside the Pervigilium Veneris, which Pound found interesting from a metrical point of view:

"The metric is noteworthy, because in it are seen certain tendencies indigenous to the Italian peninsula, which had long been suppressed by the imitation of Greek scansion. The measure is trochaic. That is to say my teacher told me it was trochaic...The point is that the metric of the Pervigilium probably indicated as great a change of sensibility in its day as the change from Viennese waltzes to jazz may indicate in our own."

11

But Catullus and the epigrammatists, with their incisive irony and plain, direct speech, attracted him and gave him one more field of practice in the perfection of concise diction. I said in an earlier chapter that it was difficult, on first reading, to see very much point to many of the poems in Lustra. They seem to be little more than flat, prosaic statements displaying a notable lack of poetic perception on Pound's part. This is true if one approach them expecting to find intricate verbal music and expressions of troubadour-like personae as in the earlier poems; but they are to be seen as a completely different mode of Pound's technical development. Of course, some of the poems are bad; disinterested satire can be carried too far, and 'plain' speech must be strictly controlled if it is not to become dull and even bathetic:

"...Come, my songs,  
Let us take arms against this sea of stupidities -  
Beginning with Mumpodorus;  
And against this sea of vulgarities -  
Beginning with Nimmim;  
And against this sea of imbeciles -  
All the Bulmenian literati."

("Salvationists")

This never even begins to approach the standard of "Arides"

"The bashful Arides  
Has married an ugly wife,  
He was bored with his manner of life,

Indifferent and discouraged he thought he might as  
Well do this as anything else.

Saying within his heart, 'I am no use to myself,  
'Let her, if she wants me, take me.'  
He went to his doom."

Clearly, some readers, placing this and similar pieces  
alongside poems like "Francesca", "Ballatetta", or  
"Cino" would be highly dissatisfied. Realisation that  
poetry does not always consist in the 'poetic' is alien  
to a great many people today - which might be a partial  
explanation of the current dislike of the Augustans  
among first-year English students. Eliot's remark that  
the reader "who does not like Pound's epigrams should  
make very sure that he is not comparing them with the  
Ode to a Nightingale before he condemns them" <sup>12</sup> is  
not as meaningless as it first appears to be.

Pound admired Catullus because he was 'hard-  
edged', Propertius because of his beautiful cadence,  
"though he had only one metre", Martial and the Greek  
epigrammatists of the Anthology for their mastery of  
tone and their concentration. A very early example of  
Pound's Latin translation is the version of Propertius'  
Elegy 111,26:

"Haec tua, Persephone, maneat clementia, nec tu,  
Persephones coniunx, saevior esse velis.  
sunt apud infernos tot milia formosarum:  
pulcra sit in superbis, si licet, una locis.  
vobiscum est Iope, vobiscum candida Tyro,  
vobiscum Europe, nec proba Pasiphae,  
et quot Troia tulit vetus et quot Achaia formas,  
et Phoebi et Priami diruta regna senis:  
et quaecumque erat in numero Romana puella,  
occidit: has omnis ignis avarus habet.  
nec forma aeternum aut cuiquam est fortuna  
perennis:  
longius aut propius mors sua quemque manet..."<sup>13</sup>

which he calls "Prayer for his Lady's Life":

"Here let thy clemency, Persephone, hold firm,  
Do thou, Pluto, bring here no greater harshness.  
So many thousand beauties are gone down to  
Avernus,  
Ye might let one remain above with us.

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12. Ezra Pound: Selected Poems, ed. T.S.Eliot. pp.16-17.

13. Vide the Loeb translation, 11, 28a.

With you is Iope, with you the white-gleaming  
Tyro,  
With you is Europa and the shameless Pasiphae,  
And all the fair from Troy and all from Achaia,  
From the sundered realms, of Thebes and of aged  
Priamus;  
And all the maidens of Rome, as many as they were,  
They died and the greed of your flame consumes  
them."

This was written sometime before 1911. Pound simply translates the words and is bogged down in Victorian cliché and phraseology: 'Ye might let one remain above with us' is a very periphrastic rendering of 'pulcra sit in superis, si licet, una locis'; and 'as many as they were' is a Leaf-Lang-Myers piece of translator's jargon which means almost nothing. In Homage to Sextus Propertius (1917) the same piece runs

"Persephone and Dis, Dis, have mercy upon her,  
There are quite enough women in hell,  
quite enough beautiful women,  
Iope, and Tyro, and Pasiphae, and the formal girls  
of Achaia,  
And out of Troad, and from the Campania,  
Death has his tooth in the lot,  
Avernus lusts for the lot of them,  
Beauty is not eternal, no man has perennial fortune,  
Slow foot, or swift foot, death delays but for a  
season."

Here he supplies the last two lines, omitted in the earlier version. This is a much more 'free' translation than the first, but it would be a pedant who could decry it as an unfaithful one. Pound is not presenting a persona of Propertius; he is using the Latin poet's own technique to make a new poem. The language is restrainedly ironic, not coy as it was before; the rhythm is a rough elegiac pentameter with the English cadence stressing important words - 'hell', 'formal', 'lot'. 'Formal girls of Achaia' is something of a pun on 'quot Achaia formas' which would worry narrowminded purists like Robert Graves, but which here sets the tone of the whole piece.

A translation from Catullus which was printed

with the epigrams in Lustra shows Pound's elegant 'society verse' at its best. "To Formianus' Young Lady Friend" sticks closely to the original, but is far from being a mere transcription:

"Salve, nec minimo puella naso  
nec bello pede nec nigris ocellis  
nec longis digitis nec ore sicco  
nec sane nimis elegante lingua,  
decoctoris amica Formiani.  
ten provincia narrat esse bellam?  
tecum Lesbia nostra comparatur?  
o saeculum insapiens et infacetum!"

"All hail! young lady with a nose  
by no means too small,  
With a foot unbeautiful,  
and with eyes that are not black,  
With fingers that are not long, and with a mouth  
undry,  
And with a tongue by no means too elegant,  
You are the friend of Formianus, the vendor of  
cosmetics,  
And they call you beautiful in the province,  
And you are even compared to Lesbia.  
O most unfortunate age!"

It is easy to see how this 'language- and tone-practice' gave rise to the already-quoted satires in Lustra and to the sophisticated verse of Moeurs Contemporaines:

"Mr. Hecatomb Styrax, the owner of a large estate  
and of large muscles,  
A 'blue' and a climber of mountains, has married  
at the age of 28,  
He being at that age a virgin,  
The term 'virgo' being made male in mediaeval  
latinity;  
His ineptitudes  
Have driven his wife from one religious excess to  
another.  
She has abandoned the vicar,  
For he was lacking in vehemence;  
She is now the high-priestess  
Of a modern and ethical cult,  
And even now Mr. Styrax  
Does not believe in aesthetics..."

("Mr. Styrax")

Leopardi's "Sopra il Ritratto di una Bella Donna" was translated by Pound in 1911, before he had forged a language free from Pre-Raphaelite decoration and Swinburnian ornament. Pound fails to bring over the almost classical precision of form of the Italian poet

because he tries to present the latter's method 'poetically'. The mind, when one reads the original, is kept in a constant state of activity as the poem presents it with apparently diverse images in quick succession. In reading Pound's version the mind is forced to stop and struggle with adjectives and periphrases:

".....Quell' amorosa mano,  
Che spesso, ove fu porta,  
Senti gelida far la man che strinse;  
E il seno, onde la gente  
Visibilmente di pallor si tinse,  
Furo alcun tempo: or fango  
Ed ossa sei: la vista  
Vituperosa e trista un sasso asconde..."

appears as

"O palms of love, that in your wonted ways  
Not once but many a day  
Felt hands turn ice a-sudden, touching ye,  
That ye were once! of all the grace ye had  
That which remaineth now  
Shameful, most sad,  
Finds 'neath this rock fit mould, fit resting-place"

The functional rhyme, both internal and at the end of the line, which punctuates Leopardi's stanza is omitted; significant images are left untranslated; the important emphases, ironic on 'fango' and cynically poignant on 'sasso' are lost in a contrived, artificial concentration. The cynicism which is a feature of Leopardi's poem is absent.

In his essay "These be your Gods, O Israel" Mr. Robert Graves attacks Pound, Eliot, Auden and other poets in a studiously unfair way; he demolishes them (so he obviously thinks) by attacking any facet of writing or personality which seems to be contrary to his rather narrow tastes, and omits any mention of anything good or attractive. For instance, he implies that Eliot was able to reach a certain poetic standard (which

he immediately belittles) because Eliot stayed in England during the Great War while he, Graves, went off and 'did his bit', so, apparently, losing all opportunity to improve his own verse. He presents Pound as an ingrate who picked his friends' brains and then "went mad dog and bit the hand that fed him" - the hand in this particular case belonging to Yeats. He fails, of course, to lead evidence supporting his statements. The whole tone of his essay leaves a sour taste in the mouth, coming as it does from a man who is capable of producing poetry of the calibre of "To Juan at the Winter Solstice". Perhaps the crowning piece of arrogant stupidity is his assessment of Pound's translations. After acknowledging the fact that he himself knows no Provençal, Graves informs the reader that his son ( then aged thirteen) speaks fluent Majorcan, "which is similar to Provençal"; on being given a copy of Pound's translation of some Provençal song together with the original, Graves' little boy "laughed and laughed." On the basis of this devastating criticism, Graves decides that all Pound's translations must necessarily be "laughable", and that his much-vaunted erudition is nothing more than the petty dilettantism of a charlatan.

It is this sort of critical prejudice and blindness that Pound set out to cure with his translations. It is perfectly true that a good many of them are simply exercises and not very good poems, as I have shown; a poet, like an athlete, must practise to achieve success. It is very easy to decry Pound's work in this field and to remain ignorant of the reasons for which he undertook it. In the ABC of Reading he cites a long list of foreign works - "the minimum that a man would have to read if he hoped to know what a given new book was worth". With regard to

the list,

"...one ingenious or ingenuous attacker suggested that I had included certain poems...because I myself had translated them. The idea that during twenty-five years' search I had translated the poems BECAUSE they were the key positions or the best illustrations, seems not to have occurred to him.

14

If Pound had not been a translator, Eliot says, his reputation as an 'original' poet would have been higher. The essay in which this statement is included <sup>15</sup> is possibly one of Eliot's best, but this particular belief is a little misleading. If Pound had not been a translator, his 'original' poetry would not have been nearly as great as it is. Theories learned from Hulme, Ford, Japanese and Chinese poetics and so on would have been barren had Pound not formed his technique through translation. The "dead art of cantabile" was brought back to life because he practised it in his Provençal renderings; flexibility of tone grew in his own poetry while he struggled with Latin, German and Chinese; new rhythms were produced, again by the Latin and by Anglo-Saxon; and a 'new' language for poetry was forged as he assimilated the techniques of his chosen masters. His own poetry is not the only beneficiary of this work; Auden has said that very few good poets writing today can claim not to have been influenced by Pound at some stage or other.

"A great age of literature is always a great age of translations," Pound repeats over and over again. Translation injects new and refreshing ideas, methods, and language-possibilities which other poets are never slow to take up. He points out that after the period of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, English poetry

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14. ABC of Reading, p.41.

15. Introduction to his edition of Pound's shorter poems: Selected Poems of Ezra Pound, London, Faber & Faber, 1928. Reprinted 1948.

"lives on translation...every new exuberance, every new heave is stimulated by translation". The How to Read pamphlet (1931) illustrates this thesis in detail, citing great English translators from Chaucer, Gawin Douglas, Golding, Marlowe et al to Swinburne and Rossetti:

"In mentioning these translations, I don't in the least admit or imply that any man in our time can think with only one language...The writer or reader who is content with such ignorance simply admits that his particular mind is of less importance than his kidneys or his automobile... (The) list does not, obviously, contain the names of every author who has ever written a good poem... I merely insist that without this minimum the critic has almost no chance of sound judgment." 16

While paying homage to the Nineteenth-Century translators, Pound makes the point that the language which they used and which remained the language of English poetry until well into the present century, led to two practices which made the job of a modern translator very difficult: their attempt to keep every adjective, when obviously many adjectives in the original have only melodic value, and their utilisation of the syntax of the original when they were making the English version, introduced a precedent which is only now really falling away.

"When I 'translated' Guido eighteen years ago (i.e. in 1912) I did not see Guido at all... What obfuscated me was not the Italian but the crust of dead English, the sediment present in my own vocabulary...It takes six or eight years to get educated in one's art and another ten to get rid of that education." 17

To see the truth of this one has only to compare his first translation of Cavalcanti's sonnet "Chi è questa che vien" with the one made in 1928. <sup>18</sup> The first is full of charming Victorianisms - "adown her trodden ways", "each sighs piteously" and the like; whereas the later, although it loses fervour because it is written

16. How to Read, pp.36-9.

17. "Cavalcanti" - Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, p.193.

18. Vide Appendix C.

in a Chaucerian style which tends to be slow, is purged of 'poeticisms', and is clear and explicit. Pound realised that the objections to this method were the doubt as to whether a poet has the right to take a serious poem and turn it into a mere exercise, and the misrepresentation of the relative antiquity of the poem. But he was trying to do something which both he and Rossetti had not, because of their language, been able to do: the communication, not only of the verbal meaning, but of the associations and atmosphere. The Chaucerian English was the closest medium which he could find. There was no question of giving Cavalcanti in an English contemporary version, because "the ultimate Britons were at that date unbreeched, painted with woad, and grunting in an idiom far more difficult for us to master than the Langue d'Oc of the Plantagenets or the Lingua di Si."<sup>19</sup> Pound's translations of Guido's sonnets, in the later versions, rise above mere renderings because of this perception. In the Cantos atmosphere is communicated by a modification of the method which he learned while translating.

Once he had formed his language, and had got beyond the stage of translating merely to give the meaning of the melodic, rhythmic, or tonal original, the object was, as he wrote to W.H.D.Rouse, to find real speech in the English version, and to render with fidelity the 'overall' meaning and the atmosphere. Following this theory, the later translations tend to be personae, rather than word-for-word transcriptions. The best of Pound's 'translations', then, exist in more than one way: they show some technical skill which Pound thought worth bringing over into English verse; they communicate the atmosphere or 'feel' of the

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19. "Cavalcanti", p.199.

original and of the time in which it was written; and they exist as personae of Pounds. The Propertius sequence and the first few Cantos are perhaps the most striking examples of this fact.

One more point remains to be noted: Pound has always recommended translation as good discipline for young writers. "Try translating the poem you are writing into another language," he writes; "if the meaning wobbles, rewrite it."<sup>20</sup> Thus the study of the original before the actual writing of the new version demands a profound critical assessment of the author's sense. The technical discipline required in the putting-down on paper of a faithful re-creation of all that made the first poem worth translating, is another side of the solid benefit conferred by this branch of poetic practice. It is not for nothing that almost all the literary histories of Italy and France deal in some detail with the work of translators. Pound's translations gave him skills which he would very possibly not have acquired otherwise, and from them he was able to draw principles which have helped modern poets tremendously. Those readers and writers unable to enjoy literatures other than English, can, by a study of Pound's work, acquire some knowledge of fields which would normally remain closed to them, and can form an idea of the relative values of contemporary periods in English poetry; but

"...in the long run the translator is in all probability impotent to do all of the work for the linguistically lazy reader. He can show where the treasure lies, he can guide the reader in choice of what tongue is to be studied, and he can very materially assist the hurried student who has a smattering of a language and the energy to read the original text alongside the metrical gloze." 21

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20. Letter to the present writer. V. also "A Retrospect" in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, p.7.

21. "Cavalcanti", p.200.

The other sort of translation, where Pound is really writing a new poem, is dealt with in the following chapter. Falling as it does in the realm of original composition, the Homage to Sextus Propertius requires a different sort of criticism from that in the present chapter; a criticism which must, however, be tempered with the realisation that the poem owes its existence in its final form to the composition of an earlier writer.

PROPERTIUS AND MAUBERLEY: CULMINATION.

"The age demanded an  
image  
Of its accelerated grimace"

("Mauberley")

Soon after Harriet Monroe published in Poetry an emasculated selection from the Homage to Sextus Propertius, one William Gardner Hale, Professor of Classics in the University of Chicago, ridiculed Pound's 'translation' in the same magazine. Several classicists have followed him, not least among them being Robert Graves and Martin Gilkes. The latter, in an article entitled "Discovery of Ezra Pound"<sup>1</sup> dealing specifically with the Homage, had the grace to say that his knowledge of Provençal and Chinese was deficient, and that he could not honestly judge Pound's efforts in these languages:

"But I do know Latin...One cannot help making comparisons with the original. A mistranslation is as disconcerting as a wrong note in a familiar piece of music. An entire misconception is a more serious shock - and Mr. Pound (at least when he touches the literature of Greece and Rome) is as full of such shocks as an electric eel.

It so happens that there is one long and complete poem of his which deals entirely with one of the great literary figures of Augustan Rome.....a veritable snow-storm of 'schoolboy howlers,' any one of them enough to make Jones Minor hang his head in shame....."

Hale at least had the excuse that Poetry's publication of the Homage included only four sections of the poem, which is written in twelve; and that the selection appeared under a somewhat misleading title. But Mr. Gilkes had the whole poem before him, as did Mr. Graves; with this in mind their 'entire misconception' is the

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1. English. Vol.2, no.8. 1938.

most serious shock of all. The unfortunate truth is that they, and the group for which they act as spokesmen, are blinded by pedantry in the field in which one would most expect them to have some measure of perception.

One is saved from the danger of attempting to justify an adaptation from a language of which one has a superficial knowledge by taking account of Pound's own replies to the attacks on the poem. In 1922 he wrote to his former Professor, Felix Schelling, apropos a review which the latter had written :

"1. No, I have not done a translation of Propertius, That fool in Chicago took the Homage for a translation, despite the mention of Wordsworth and the parodied line from Yeats. (As if, had one wanted to pretend to more Latin than one knew, it wdn't have been perfectly easy to correct one's divergencies from a Bohn crib. Price 5 shillings.)

I do think, however, that the homage has scholastic value. MacKail (accepted as 'right' opinion on the Latin poets) hasn't, apparently, any inkling of the way in which Propertius is using Latin. Doesn't see that S.P. is tying blue ribbon in the tails of Virgil and Horace, or that sometime after his first 'book' S.P. ceased to be the dupe of magniloquence and began to touch words somewhat as Laforgue did." 2

Hale had censured Pound for, among other things, his rendering of

"et Veneris dominae volucres, mea turba, columbae  
tingunt Gorgoneo Punica rostra lacu;"

as

"The small birds of the Cytharean mother,  
their Punic faces dyed in the Gorgon's lake"

suggesting that on the evidence of this and other 'miscarriages' Pound as translator had nothing left to do but commit suicide. Pound wrote to A.R.Orage in April of 1919, just after Hale's review had appeared, and said:

"As a Prof. of Latin and example of why Latin poets are not read, as example of why one would like to deliver poets of philologers, Hale

should be impeccable and without error. He has NO claim to refrain from suicide if he errs in any point...He ignores English.

'Their Punic faces dyed in the Gorgon's lake'  
one of my best lines. Punic (Punicus) used for dark red, dark purple by Ovid and Horace as well as Propertius. Audience familiar with Tyrian for purple in English. To say nothing of augmented effect on imagination by using Punic (whether in translation or not) instead of 'red'..... It may instruct Hale to tell him that the Teubner text (printed 1898) uses Punica with a cap. P, especially emphasising the Latin usage of proper name in place of a colour adjective. I.E., the Teubner editor is emphasising a Latinism which I have brought over. He is not allowing the connection of a proper name with a particular dark red to drift into an uncapitalised adjective..." 3

Most of Hale's other objections (and all of Gilkes') deal with similar puns on the Latin. One which caused much malevolent glee among those classicists who are also pedants - and who fail to recognise the fact that they are puns of a sort) was the rendering of

"carminis interea nostri redeamus in orbem:  
gaudeat in solito tacta puella sono"

as

"And in the meantime my songs will travel,  
And the devirginated young ladies will enjoy them  
when they have got over the strangeness"

Hale protested that 'tacta' simply meant 'touched by the poet's words'. But as Propertius uses it, it is ambiguous; Lawrence Richardson points out<sup>4</sup> that

"...it includes both: touched at heart and the opposite of intacta (virgin); Pound's rendering does violence to the context, but it is the meaning which will escape the casual reader."

One over which Mr. Gilkes chortles for a page is

"Actia Vergilium custodis litora Phoebi,  
Caesaris et fortes dicere posse rates"

which means 'let Virgil treat of the shores of Actium watched over by Phoebus, and Caesar's gallant warships.'

Pound gives it as

"Upon the Actian marshes Virgil is Phoebus'  
chief-of-police,  
He can tabulate Caesar's great ships."

3. Ibid. pp.211-2.

4. In an article on Pound and Propertius in Yale Poetry Review No.6. 1947.

The temptation of 'custodis' - custodian - policeman proves too much for Pound, and he twists the original text to get a similar meaning with greater concentration of associations.

Associations - that is the point of the 'puns' which the pedants, intent on syntax and blind to anything else, have been unable to understand. They are explained when one adds to Pound's perception of Propertius' irony his contention that the 'dance of the intellect among words' is to be found in the work of that poet:

"Unless I am right in discovering logopoeia in Propertius (which means unless the academic teaching of Latin displays crass insensitivity as it probably does) we must almost say that Laforgue invented logopoeia....." 5

and his warning to young poets:

"Logopoeia does not translate; though the attitude of mind it expresses may pass through a paraphrase. Or one might say, you can not translate it 'locally', but having determined the original author's state of mind, you may or may not be able to find a derivative or an equivalent." 6

Pound's transference of Propertius' logopoeia is integral to the theme of his poem, an understanding of which it is necessary to obtain before passing on to the actual poetic techniques which make it. Pound himself supplied the answer in a letter to the editor of the English Journal in 1931, fourteen years after the poem was written, when he replied to a criticism of it contributed to that magazine by Harriet Monroe:

"As Miss Monroe has never yet discovered what the ...poem is, I may perhaps avoid charges of further mystification and wilful obscurity by saying that it presents certain emotions as vital to me in 1917, faced with the infinite and ineffable imbecility of the British Empire, as they were to Propertius some centuries earlier, when faced with the infinite and ineffable imbecility of the Roman Empire. These emotions are defined largely, but not entirely, in Propertius' own terms....." 7

5. How to Read, p.30.

6. Ibid. p.20.

7. The Letters of Ezra Pound, p.310.

To go into further detail, more light is thrown on the subject by a passage in Pound's article on Rémy de Gourmont (Instigations, 1920):

"In Diomède we find an Epicurean receptivity, a certain aloofness, an observation of contacts and auditions, in contrast to the Propertian attitude:

'Ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit',  
this is perhaps balanced by

'Sans vous, je crois bien que je n'aimerais plus beaucoup et que je n'aurais plus une extrême confiance ni dans la vie ni moi-même.'

...In a criticism of him, 'criticism' being an over-violent word, in, let us say, an indication of him, one wants merely to show that one has oneself made certain dissociations; as here, between the aesthetic receptivity of tactile and magnetic values, of the perception of beauty in these relationships and the conception of love, passion, emotion as an intellectual instigation; such as Propertius claims it; such as we find it declared in the King of Navarre's

'De fine amor vient science et beauté;  
and constantly in the troubadours."

8

And remembering that Hardy had suggested that Pound change the title of the poem, showing that he, at least, was aware of the subject, one may see on reading the Homage that it is concerned with the place of the poet in an unsympathetic age; in a society which ignored private passion and skill in favour of assumed, artificial public rectitude, morality, and rhetoric:

"I had been seen in the shade, recumbent on  
cushioned Helicon,  
The water dripping from Bellerophon's horse,  
Alba, your kings, and the realm your folk  
have constructed with such industry  
Shall be yawned out on my lyre - with such industry.  
My little mouth shall gobble in such great  
fountains,  
'Wherefrom father Ennius, sitting before I came,  
hath drunk.'  
I had rehearsed the Curian brothers, and made  
remarks on the Horatian javelin  
(Near Q.H.Flaccus' bookstall).....  
And Phoebus looking upon me from the Castalian tree  
Said then 'You idiot! What are you doing with that  
water:  
'Who has ordered a book about heroes?...."

The crux of the poem lies in Propertius' passage!

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8. "Rémy de Gourmont"; reprinted in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, p.343.

"Quaeritis unde mihi totiens scribantur amores,  
unde meus veniat mollis in ora liber.  
non haec Calliope, non haec mihi cantat Apollo:  
ingenium nobis ipsa puella facit."

which emerges in Pound's poem as

"Yet you ask on what account I write so many  
love-lyrics  
And whence this soft book comes into my mouth.  
Neither Calliope nor Apollo sung these things  
into my ear,  
My genius is no more than a girl."

One cannot read very far into Pound's criticism without encountering his approving mention of this attitude; it occurs over and over again in his articles on troubadour poetry. When a poet is constrained to write 'to order', to follow an accepted, traditional mode of expression or a stifling poetic convention rather than be allowed to develop his technique along his own lines, then his work must necessarily suffer, and the work of his fellow-artists must deteriorate in proportion as they too are kept within artificial limits. The Homage to Sextus Propertius should be read with Pound's strictures on the British and American intellectual climates of the period 1900-1920 in mind.

The poem's structure is a composition of those techniques which had been brought to a high stage of development in the Lustra and Cathay volumes. One aspect was hinted at in discussing the ironic language of the Moeurs Contemporaines sequence in the former volume:

"Mr. Hecatomb Styrax, the owner of a large estate  
and of large muscles,  
A 'blue' and a climber of mountains, has married  
at the age of 28,  
He being at that age a virgin,  
The term 'virgo' being made male in medaeval  
latinity....."

Here male obviously indicates the opposite to female; but the latinate diction and the specific reference to the language conjures up in the reader's mind

certain associations which add immeasurably to the tone of the poem: one cannot help connecting 'male' - 'malus' - 'bad' - 'contemptible', to give a twofold meaning to the word as Pound uses it. The device hinges on this ironic use of latinate diction. It is present throughout the Homage -

"Persephone and Dis, Dis, have mercy upon her,  
There are enough women in hell,  
  quite enough beautiful women,  
Iope, and Tyro, and Pasiphae, and the formal  
  girls of Achaia....."

and in

"Caesar plots against India,  
Tigris and Euphrates shall, from now on, flow at  
his bidding,  
Tibet shall be full of Roman policemen,  
The Parthians shall get used to our statuary  
  and acquire a Roman religion..."

A more straightforward use of latinate diction to emphasise irony is visible in such passages as

"And my ventricles do not palpitate to Caesarial  
'ore rotundos'..."

and again in

"Was Venus exacerbated by the existence of a  
comparable equal?  
Is the ornamental goddess full of envy?  
Have you contempered Juno's Pelasgian temples,  
Have you denied Pallas good eyes?"

The contrast in tone between 'exacerbated' and 'full of envy', and between 'shall get used to' and 'shall acquire' in the other passage, the contrast of the formal as opposed to the colloquial, is central in the creation of the ironic weight of the poem.

A more emphatic expression of irony is made by a device which Pound uses extensively in Mauberley: the stressing of clichés by the use of inverted commas. Repetition and line-endings also play a part:

"I had rehearsed the Curian brothers, and made  
remarks on the Horatian javelin  
(Near Q.H.Flaccus' bookstall).  
'Of' royal Aemilia, drawn on the memorial raft,  
'Of' the victorious delay of Fabius, and the  
left-handed battle at Cannae,  
Of lares fleeing the 'Roman seat'..."

I had sung of all these  
And of Hannibal,  
and of Jove protected by geese."

and

"And she speaks ill of light women,  
and will not praise Homer  
Because Helen's conduct is 'unsuitable'."

Repetition is used to good effect in

"Alba, your kings, and the realm you folk  
have constructed with such industry  
Shall be yawned out on my lyre - with such  
industry."

The rhythm of the Homage is a development of the vers  
libre which made the Cathay poems such successful  
examples of tonal flexibility. It has been pointed out  
by someone that the iambic pentameter approximates to  
the normal length of the breath-divisions in the  
usual English sentence; a bombastic or heroic or  
rhetorical emotion demands the lengthening of this unit  
for its expression, while an intimate, a sad, or a  
nostalgic emotion demands shortening:

"Parting is all we know of heaven,  
And all we need of hell."

"Drake he's in his hammock an' a thousand mile  
away..."

"Let's march without the noise of threat'ning drum  
That from the castle's tatter'd battlements  
Our fair appointments may be well perused."

"Listen! you hear the grating roar  
Of pebbles which the waves suck back, and fling,  
At their return, up the high strand,  
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,  
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring  
The eternal note of sadness in."

In vers libre the length of the line and its rhythm  
depend entirely on the poet's feeling and ear, as is  
shown in Pound's earlier poems:

"Just a word in thy praise, girl,  
Just for the swirl  
Thy satins make upon the stair,  
'Cause never a stain was there  
Where thy torse and limbs are met..."

("Na Audiart")



her forehead,  
If she goes in a gleam of Cos, in a slither of  
dyed stuff,  
There is a volume in the matter; if her eyelids  
sink into sleep,  
There are new jobs for the author;  
And if she play with me with her shirt off,  
We shall construct many Iliads."

"Now you may bear fate's stroke unperturbed,  
Or Jove, harsh as he is, may turn aside your  
ultimate day.  
Old lecher, let not Juno get wind of the matter,  
Or perhaps Juno herself will go under,  
If the young lady is taken?  
There will be, in any case, a stir on Olympus."

"For the nobleness of the populace brooks nothing  
below its own altitude.  
One must have resonance, resonance and sonority..  
like a goose."

"Now if ever it is time to cleanse Helicon;  
to lead Emathian horses afield,  
And to name over the census of my chiefs in the  
Roman camp.  
If I have not the faculty, 'The bare attempt  
would be praise-worthy.'  
'In the things of similar magnitude,  
the mere will to act is sufficient.'"

And the new rhythms, the precision practised in the  
early poems, the logopoeia, and the sophisticated  
irony combine to make a language refreshingly fluent  
and flexible:

"Shades of Callimachus, Coan ghosts of Philetas  
It is in your grove I would walk,  
I who come first from the clear font  
Bringing the Grecian orgies into Italy,  
and the dance into Italy.  
Who hath taught you so subtle a measure,  
in what hall have you heard it;  
What foot beat out your time-bar,  
what water has mellowed your whistles?"

The Homage to Sextus Propertius is a brilliant example  
of vers libre at its best.

In an article on Harold Monroe in the  
Criterion for July 1932<sup>9</sup> Pound, in a digression on  
Eliot, stated that:

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9. Reprinted in Polite Essays, p.8.

"Our editor displayed great tact, or enjoyed good fortune, in arriving in London at a particular date with a formed style of his own. He also participated in a movement to which no name has ever been given.

That is to say, at a particular date in a particular room, two authors, neither engaged in picking each other's pocket, decided that the dilutation of vers libre, Amygism, Lee Masterism, general floppiness had gone too far, and that some counter-current must be set going. Parallel situation centuries ago in China. Remedy prescribed 'Emaux et Camées' (or the Bay State Hymn Book). Rhyme and regular strophes.

Results: Poems in Mr. Eliot's second volume, not contained in his first ('Prufrock', Egoist, 1917), also 'H.S.Mauberley'.

Divergence later."

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley has aroused the admiration of all but the most dedicated of anti-Pound critics, let alone his admirers. But in most of the essays on it, it is presented as the one poem Pound wrote which is worthy of notice; even Leavis sees it as an isolated 'accident' in which Pound's talents are displayed to their fullest advantage, but a poem which has little or no connection with anything he wrote before it or after it. This is an unbalanced view to take, as it is almost a truism that any given poem will show to a degree the influence of its predecessors and will contain in petto a indication of what its successors are built of. That this is especially true of Pound's poetry I hope I have managed to indicate. Mauberley is the culmination of his techniques up to 1920, and in its complexity, compactness, irony, and its multi-stratified meaning it is a miniature of the Cantos.

The overwhelming majority of the critical articles dealing with the poem confine themselves to examinations of its meaning, and neglect the structure of the work almost entirely. It is my intention to give a short indication of the former aspect and to concentrate upon the latter, because nearly all Pound's poetic principles meet in the form of the poem.

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is made up of eighteen short poems. The sequence begins with "E.P. Ode Pour l'Élection de son Sépulchre", which is an epitaph for Pound himself, showing both his own view of his career and his critics' view of it. The second poem presents Pound's view of the time, the England of just after the Great War. In the third he denounces commercialism, and the praise of the 'almighty dollar' at the expense of good art; the fourth poem is devoted to an intensely moving censure of the War, continuing the diatribe against the weakness of a democratic society which was started in the second poem. The fifth is a contemptuous survey of the 'tradition' for which the war-victims died. This poem ends the first part of the sequence. In the second Pound examines the reasons for the degeneration of society: he indicates how aesthetic values in the Pre-Raphaelite period were stifled by official Victorian morality, and continues by showing how the artist in the 'Nineties was driven into mediocrity by the prevailing insistence on public rectitude and convention. Then follows a number of vignettes, each showing in some way how the time affected artistic people: Brennbaum the Jew casts off his inherited traditions in order to conform to the accepted standards; Mr. Nixon, a popular journalist, gives up any pretence to artistic integrity for the sake of money and fame; the true artist is forced to live in isolation in a tumble-down hut; and the educated woman has no brilliance and no ideas of her own. In the twelfth poem Pound examines himself and his relation to this inartistic milieu; decides that London is not for him (in the first edition of the poem

a supporting note indicated that it was "...distinctly a fare-well to London..."), and finishes the second section with a wonderful love-lyric, drawn primarily from Waller's Go, Lovely Rose, which confounds the shortsighted assessments of his critics described in the first poem of the sequence. In the third part, Hugh Selwyn Mauberley himself appears for the first time. Here the poems are parallels of the first section in imagery, but are opposite to it in theme. In the first poem Mauberley's artistic limits are set out, and in the second his realisation - which comes too late- that active passion might have offered him something. The third details his artistic and personal 'misfitting' in the time, but also indicates that he was aware of this; the fourth describes his gradual decline into subjectivity and death; and the last poem is the one work which he leaves behind him, a rehandling of the theme of Pound's love-lyric in ironic (to the reader) literary terms, and without the active passion which characterised the former poem. A clearer perception of the whole sequence's ground structure is obtained when the 'contents' are shown:

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley

Part I.

E.P. Ode pour l'election de son s epulchre.  
II.  
III.  
IV.  
V.  
Yeux Glauques.  
"Siena mi fe', disfecemi Maremma"  
Brennbaum.  
Mr. Nixon.  
X.  
XI.  
XII.

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ENVOI  
1919

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Part II.

1920

(Mauberley)

- I.
- II.
- III. "The Age Demanded"
- IV.
- V. Medallion.

Thus it may be seen that the poem is in reality divided only into two parts. The first deals with Pound himself, and moves on to Pound's and Mauberley's acquaintances and contacts. Pound disappears with his Envoi and Mauberley's career is described, ironically, by Pound. The latter leaves London to find a milieu in which his artistic sensibility is given a chance to survive, while the former stays in London and dies, uncaring. The similarity in theme to Sextus Propertius is evident: the pressure which the age exerts upon the artist. In this context it must be remembered that Mauberley and Pound are not one and the same person -

"(Of course I'm no more Mauberley than Eliot is Prufrock. Mais passons.) Mauberley is a mere surface..."

10

and when one reads

"I wonder how far the Mauberley is merely a translation of the Homage to S.P., for such as couldn't understand the latter?  
An endeavour to communicate with a blockheaded epoch."

11

the similarity becomes clearer still. Recalling the passage in Pound's article on de Gourmont<sup>12</sup> one can see that Pound is the poet of "love, passion, emotion as an intellectual instigation" and that Mauberley is the poet of "aesthetic receptivity of tactile and magnetic values, of the perception of beauty in these relationships." The Pound of the Homage and the Pound of Hugh Selwyn Mauberley both react against the demands of the age; they both insist on untrammelled expression of active emotions. Mauberley himself exists as a warning; a picture of the artist who is wholly an

10. The Letters of Ezra Pound, p.249.

11. Op. Cit. p.321.

12. Vide p.144 infra.

aesthete, passionless, subjective - the artist who does not conform to the demands of the age, but who is unable to free himself from its stifling dulness.

The rhythmic structure of the suite is perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the technical side of the poem.

"The metre in Mauberley is Gautier and Bion's Adonis; or at least those are the two grafts I was trying to flavour it with. Syncopation from the Greek; and a general distaste for the slushiness and swishiness of the post-Swimburnian British line."

13

The stanzas in Emaux et Camées are anything but slushy and swishy - their severe formality and controlled compactness are well exemplified in

"Oui, l'oeuvre sort plus belle  
D'une forme au travail  
Rebelle,  
Vers, marbre, onyx, émail."

("L'Art")

and in

"Là-bas, sous les arbres s'abrite  
Une chaumière au dos bossu;  
Le toit penche, le mur s'effrite,  
Le seuil de la porte est moussu.

("Fumée")

The latter example finds more than a structural parity in

"The haven from sophistications and contentions  
Leaks through its thatch;  
He offers succulent cooking;  
The door has a creaking latch."

(X)

The former is paralleled in poem XII -

"Doubtful, somewhat, of the value  
Of well-gowned approbation  
Of literary effort,  
But never of The Lady Valentine's vocation:"

Pound adapts and modifies it in the fourth poem of the "Mauberley" section: the short third line of

Gautier's stanza is given three syllables in the first couple of verses -

"Thick foliage  
Placid beneath warm suns,  
Tawn fore-shores  
Washed in the cobalt of oblivions...

and

"Or through dawn-mist  
The grey and rose  
Of the juridical  
Flamingoes..."

but in the last three stanzas of the poem it is reduced to two, and the line is given different positions in the stanza itself to emphasise each ironical statement:

"A consciousness disjunct,  
Being but this overblotted  
Series  
Of intermittences;  
  
Coracle of Pacific voyages,  
The unforecasted beach;  
Then on an oar  
Read this:  
  
"I was  
"And I no more exist;  
"Here drifted  
"An hedonist."

Gautier's method of plain statement is apparent throughout Mauberley:

"The sleek head emerges  
From the gold-yellow frock  
As Anadyomene in the opening  
Pages of Reinach..."

(Medallion)

is a typical example. Pound had used this method extensively in Moeurs Contemporaines: "Albâtre" is an instance. It is made even more striking by the mention of Gautier himself:

"This lady in the white bath-robe which she calls  
a peignoir,  
Is, for the time being, the mistress of my friend,  
And the delicate white feet of her little white  
dog  
Are not more delicate than she is,  
Nor would Gautier himself have despised their  
contrasts in whiteness  
As she sits in the great chair  
Between the two indolent candles."

Pound's interest in Gautier had been long-lived when he came to write Mauberley -

"Théophile Gautier is, I suppose, the next man who can write. Perfectly plain statements like his 'Carmen est maigre' should teach one a number of things."

14

This was written to Iris Barry, a protégée of Pound's, in July 1916. In 1913 he had written to Harriet Monroe and had said "...Gautier and de Gourmont carry forward the art itself, and the only way one can imitate them is by making more profound your knowledge of the very marrow of art." And in writing to René Taupin in 1928 he confessed "Gautier j'ai étudié et je le révère."

Bion, in complete contrast to Gautier, uses what Pound calls 'syncopation'. I find it difficult to understand what he means by this, as all poets 'syncopate' their mètres to a certain extent. But what is noticeable about Bion's verse<sup>15</sup> is that, in contrast to the usual Greek compositions, it has (in the Epitaph at any rate) no pretence toward regular arrangement of strophes; passages are of unequal length and repetitions of phrases, individual words, and so on occur frequently. These repetitions and the irregularity of lines impart a certain hesitation which could be termed syncopation. One is able to illustrate this by taking a passage from the Epitaph and then breaking it up:

"Cho men oistos,  
os d'epi toxon eball, os de pteron, os de pharetran.  
Cho men elyse pedilon Adonidos, oi de lebeti  
chryseio phoreoisin udor, o de meria loyei,  
os d'opithen pterygessin anapsychei ton Adonin."

A syncopated effect is obtained if one set out the lines in the following manner:

"Cho men oistos,  
os d'epi toxon eball,  
os de pteron,

14. The Letters of Ezra Pound, p.139.

15. I am indebted to Mr. H. Hewitt for help with this particular section.

os de pharetran.  
Cho men elyse pedilon Adonidos  
oi de lebeti  
chryseio phoreoisin udor,  
o de meria loyei,  
os d'opithen pterygessin anapsychei ton Adonin."

When this is compared with a section of poem number  
IV it becomes apparent that what Pound means by  
Bion's syncopation is the repetition, the irregularities,  
the hesitations :

"Some quick to arm,  
some for adventure,  
some from fear of weakness,  
some from fear of censure,  
some for love of slaughter, in imagination,  
learning later...  
some in fear, learning love of slaughter;  
...Daring as never before, wastage as never before.  
Young blood and high blood,  
fair cheeks, and fine bodies;  
fortitude as never before  
frankness as never before,  
disillusions as never told in the old days,  
hysterias, trench confessions,  
laughter out of dead bellies."

But syncopation does not only mean repetition and a  
consequent hesitation; it denotes a stress in an  
unexpected place. A device which could, with a little  
generosity, be called syncopation is Pound's use of the  
semi-colon to introduce a momentary halt and a stress-  
shift in the middle of a line:

"For three years, out of key with his time,  
He strove to resuscitate the dead art  
Of poetry; to maintain 'the sublime'  
In the old sense. Wrong from the start -"

In the "Mauberley" section a hesitant effect is produced  
by the use of dots:

"Drifted...drifted precipitate,  
Asking time to be rid of...  
Of his bewilderment; to designate  
His new found orchid...."

Here the repetition and semi-colon again play their  
parts, but the dots are the more important. In a little  
poem published in Ripostes the dots were used in  
precisely the same way -

"Spring.....  
Too long.....  
Gongula.....

("Papyrus")

Pound was violently attacked for this; his attackers were perhaps justified, because it cannot be regarded as a serious poem. But not one of the critics realise that it is simply a translation from a fragment of a poem of Sappho. Taking into account the title, it becomes clear that the poem is a fragment of a letter by a young man to his girl, Gongula, in which he says that Spring has arrived and he has been too long away from her. Pound uses the actual lacunae in the Sapphic text to make significant symbols in his little poem with the help of the dots, which here indicate the missing portions of the letter. In the Mauberley poem the dots represent Mauberley's subjective, drifting, passive thoughts. Repetition is used again in

"Firmness  
Not the full smile,  
His art, but an art  
In profile;"

together with the formal strictness of Gautier. The rhythm of Mauberley, while being controlled, is never a monotonous one; this is because the Gautier graft is woven against that from Bion throughout. Neither method is allowed to become tyrannous.

The tone of the sequence is subtly ironic. Gautier's flat statement has of course a good deal to do with this, but there are other factors. Lustra, "absolutely the last obsequies of the Victorian period" prepared the way for the precise, latinate diction in both the Homage and Mauberley. The devices used in the former poem - the enclosure of clichés and hackneyed phrases with inverted commas, and the puns on latinate words - are used again. In connection with this last, it should be pointed out that one of

the recurrent series of images is sexual; consider the following stanzas, which refer specifically to Mauberley himself and his inability to recognise the beckoning of passion until it is too late:

"Drifted...drifted precipitate,  
Asking time to be rid of...  
Of his bewilderment; to designate  
His new found orchid...  
To be certain...certain...  
(Amid aerial flowers)...time for  
arrangements -  
Drifted on  
To the final estrangement;  
Unable in the supervening blankness  
To sift TO AGATHON from the chaff  
Until he found his sieve...  
Ultimately, his seismograph:.....  
.....He had passed, unconscious, full gaze,  
The wide-banded irides  
And boticellian sprays implied  
In their diastasis;  
Which anaesthesia, noted a year late,  
And weighed, revealed his great affect,  
(Orchid), mandate  
Of Eros, a retrospect.  
+ + + + +  
Mouths biting empty air,  
The still stone dogs,  
Caught in metamorphosis, were  
Left him as epilogues."

'Orchid' in the first stanza would seem to be nothing more than a symbolic flower; but the fourth and fifth stanzas bring it into a second focus. The mention of Eros gives the clue - and one remembers that 'orchis' is the Greek word for testicle. With this sexual connotation in mind, the fourth stanza takes on a new meaning entirely: we can see that 'irides' means not only the flower, but also the pupil of the eye; 'boticellian sprays' indicates the entwined male and female Wind-figures in the famous picture - again with sexual overtones; the 'diastasis' indicates the dilation of the pupil in an invitation to passion. Thus Mauberley,

"Given that is his "fundamental passion,"  
This urge to convey the relation

Of eye-lid and cheek-bone  
By verbal manifestations;  
To present the series  
Of curious heads in medallion -"

saw the women he moved among simply as subjects for his 'medallions'; saw the invitations in their eyes, but was so intent on 'designating his new-found orchid' (here meaning the urge to convey the relation of eye-lid and cheek-bone in words) that he did not recognise them as invitations; and when 'his great affect/ (Orchid), mandate of Eros' finally is recognised, finds that the opportunity has gone. All he is left with are his 'medallions'; Pound, the commentator, indicates just how much use they were to him by comparing them with Ovid's Laelaps and his quarry; symbols of intense activity, petrified before any decisively compromising action can take place. The last verse of the last poem in the sequence, Mauberley's own "Medallion", the poem he leaves behind him when he drifts off to a passively hedonistic death in the South Seas, is an intensely ironic comment by Pound on Mauberley's insensitivity at the same time as it shows the quality of Mauberley's poetry:

"The face-oval beneath the glaze,  
Bright in its suave bounding-line, as,  
Beneath half-watt rays,  
The eyes turn topaz."

A full examination of all the rhythmic, tonal, symbolic, and interpretational levels at which the poem can be read would need the scope of a book solely devoted to the subject.<sup>16</sup> As Hugh Kenner says, at its deepest levels Mauberley is virtually unread. One further example of the almost savage irony which Pound uses in it here and there also gives a fair indication of the depth to which one has to go: in the third poem of the suite, where the tawdriness of the post-1918 civilisation is

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16. Since writing this I obtained Mr. J.J. Espey's "Ezra Pound's Mauberley, A Study in Composition"

attacked. After a bitter denunciation of modern values, the section concludes with the following stanza:

"O bright Apollo,  
tin' andra, tin' eroa, tina thoon,  
What god, man, or hero  
Shall I place a tin wreath upon!"

The thumping stresses in the Greek are ironically set against the 'tin' wreath - and Pound cannot think of anyone to crown with the wreath. The irony is intensified when one remembers that Pindar, from whom the Greek is taken and adapted, was fairly low in Pound's estimation - "Theban eagle be blowed! A damned rhetorician half the time!" he wrote to Miss Monroe.

Hugh Selwyn Mauberley is the summit of Pound's poetic achievement up till 1920. Its construction, complex but exquisitely balanced, makes it one of the foremost, if not the foremost, of the poems written in English this century. If everything Pound ever wrote were to be burned, and Mauberley allowed to remain, Pound's reputation as one of the greatest of modern poets would remain secure. It is not yet the time to attempt any full assessment of the Cantos; but if they do turn out to be, on the whole, a failure - and one must entertain doubts as to their ultimate success - Mauberley would stand out as the sum of one man's poetic techniques - a sum which justifies any of the astonishing critical pronouncements for which its author is so frequently derided.

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published by Faber & Faber. It represents a most detailed and illuminating study of the poem, and is a mine of information for the student of Pound's works. It does not change anything I have said about Mauberley, but would possibly have helped me to condense somewhat.

CRITICISM: THE HEALTH OF THE WORD.

"To hell with Harper's  
and the magazine touch.

(Letters.)

Wyndham Lewis' assertion that Pound on his arrival in England simply 'wished to impress' and to show that he was far superior to other poets in the matter of technique illuminates a facet of Pound's character which is visible on recurrent occasions in both his poetry and his prose writings. He was a typical example of the 'singing cowboy', gauche and filled with unshakeable confidence in his own potentiality; Edith Sitwell in 1934 remembered him as breaking into the literary ambience of the London of 1908 "heedless of wickets and careless of tea-parties, walking with natural, free and beautiful movements according to the law of his nature." He had long before made up his mind that if one wanted to claim success in the field of poetry one had to work at it, and he was naturally irritated by the aloof unwillingness of the English intellectuals to have their shortcomings in the matter of literary taste dissected and their chronic amateurism shown up. He found this attitude all around him in England, right up to the day he left the "Stupid little island", and never ceased to decry it.

It has been shown that the authentic artist in Edwardian and Georgian England was overwhelmed by crowds of enthusiastic pseudo-intellectuals from the middle-class, pouring out mediocre poetry and prose and drawing to themselves all the critical praise at the expense of the professionals; the open-handed critics encouraged the state of affairs by their insistence, not on artistic perfection, but on social

acceptability.<sup>1</sup> Pound made the mistake of trying to lecture to the herd, and found that he was rebuffed as being a professional: the writing of poetry was regarded as a pastime for the exercise of some natural talent, like tennis at Wimbledon, and anyone who took it too seriously was beyond the pale. In 1918 he wrote of his stand:

"In a country in love with amateurs, in a country where the incompetent have such beautiful manners and personalities so fragile and charming, that one cannot bear to injure their feelings by the introduction of competent criticism, it is well that one man should have a vision of perfection and that he should be sick to the death and disconsolate because he cannot attain it." 2

In the same book he said "it is impossible to talk about perfection without getting yourself very much disliked. It is even more difficult in a capital where everybody's Aunt Lucy or Uncle George has written something or other." The trouble with his unwilling pupils was that they desired the fruits of craftsmanship without its toils, and they had no time for the relentless and rigorous tests which he demanded. In addition to being up against the shunning of professionalism, Pound and the few who agreed with his views were confronted with literary diplomacy such as that of Edmund Gosse, who, in his capacity as librarian of the House of Lords, found it necessary to write to the editor of La Revue des Deux Mondes and ask him not to review or even mention Joyce's Ulysses. The poetry which should have been the 'living tradition' was

"...from 1890 to 1910 a horrible agglomerate compost, not minted, most of it not even baked, all legato, a doughy mess of third-hand Keats, Wordsworth, heaven knows what, fourth-hand Elizabethan sonority blunted, half-melted, lumpy."<sup>3</sup>

In addition to their stony boredom in the face of

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1. Vide ch. 1.

2. From "The Prose Tradition in Verse", in Poetry; reprinted in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound.

3. "Hell"; reprinted in Polite Essays from Criterion April 1934.

attempts to 'impress' them, the English writers were content to wallow in well-worn ruts; they believed in habit, and Pound's ideas of the "revolution of the word" and his opinion that "good letters have some significance in the health of the State" were alien to their sensibility.

A good deal of the distaste in which Pound was held is due to the vehemence with which he expounded his theories, and the all-too-articulate force with which he insisted on the error of almost everybody except himself and those whose ideas found favour with him. Time has shown whose views were correct, but Pound is still berated for the tone of his criticism, which is surely somewhat beside the point. It is true that from the first days in London until the present, he has shown a passion for maestria which has never been sated. In much of his writing there is an unmistakable glimpse of the professor manqué, which sometimes intrudes upon a given work at the expense of its intended aesthetic effect; but equally apparent is the fact that just as much of his prose and poetry is intended to be pedagogic. The fault is a fault in the character of Pound himself; it is responsible for the weird spelling and the obscenities in many of his letters, for the 'Christ-portrait' printed as frontispiece to Lustra, and for the oracular tone of many of the utterances of the present-day Pound - "ole Grampa in the bughouse" (ipse dixit).<sup>4</sup> It is excusable on the grounds that no-one else had anything quite as important to say pertaining to the technique of poetry and the function of criticism; nor could anyone support his theories with poetic proof as solid as Pound's.

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4. Since April 1958 no longer "in the bughouse."

Christopher Fry wrote a sentence which can be applied to him:

"I apologise  
For boasting, but once you know my qualities  
I can drop back into a quite brilliant  
Humility..."

Pound, like very many writers after all, has a good deal of respect for his own brilliance and sensitivity. Harriet Monroe annoyed Pound intensely by delaying publication of the work of new poets he sent in to her. She thought Eliot too risqué, and Pound had to bully her by letter for six months before she decided to run the risk of letting his poems appear in Poetry. Some of Pound's best criticism of contemporary poets was occasioned by her narrowness and his subsequent striving to 'educate' her in the ways of modern verse. One of the first of his own poems to appear in her magazine was "To Whistler, American", which is important because it enables one to catch a glimpse of several sides of Pound-the-critic. There is also a fat slice of Pound-the-village-atheist, the fanatical artist, sketched in the beginning of this chapter. The poem is also interesting because it shows, in addition to his self-esteem, Pound's struggle with language:

"You also, our first great,  
Had tried all ways;  
Tested and pried and worked in many fashions,  
And this much gives me heart to play the game.  
Here is part that's slight, and part gone wrong,  
And much of little moment, and some few  
Perfect as Dürer!  
'In the Studio' and these two portraits, if I  
    had my choice!  
And then these sketches in the mood of Greece?  
You had your searches, your uncertainties,  
And this is good to know - for us, I mean,  
Who bear the brunt of our America  
And try to wrench her impulse into art.  
You were not always sure, not always set  
To hiding night or tuning 'symphonies';  
Had not one style from birth, but tried and pried  
And stretched and tampered with the media.  
You and Abe Lincoln from that mass of dolts  
Show us there's chance at least of winning through."

No-one can miss the awkwardness with which this is written: the uncertain breaking-off from the regular beat of the iamb to the trochaic beat of common speech, and the uneasy shifting from affected literary phrases to half-hearted efforts at pushing the words into their natural order, making the tone suffer (e.g. in stanza one). But the main point to be noted is Pound's view of himself as the maestro destined to lead aspiring literati on the right road to fame and perfection of technique.

His literary criticism concerns itself entirely with the health of writing; he never turns from examination of texts and meanings to chatty discussion on possible sources of plots, possible psychological aberrations affecting the outlook of a given author, or possible 'laws' for the production of great poetry. His searching confines itself to what is there to be seen and examined on the page.

His prose writing is that of a teacher passionately concerned with the recognition of what makes a particular work worth reading and studying. The titles of his books give a good indication of how he goes about arousing interest in his readers - How to Read, Instigations, Indiscretions, Make it New, and similar provocative names. He writes primarily for other writers, sharing his discoveries with them, caring far more about the whole state of literature than about his own success. Much of the body of his critical output is confined to assessments and pronouncements regarding individual authors, and as such is somewhat dated; but the principles which he made the bases of his estimates and attacks are still valid and obtain as much today as they did thirty years ago. Modern poetry owes a very great debt to his long

'course' in comparative literature; it was to a large extent his rediscovery of forgotten areas of foreign writing and his application of the techniques he learned there to his own verse, which lifted English poetry out of the slop of the early Twentieth Century. Some years ago the American Government - while detaining Pound in St. Elizabeth's Mental Hospital in Washington, D.C., - put out a brochure dealing with American culture, in which it was stated that he "has done more to serve the cause of English poetry than anyone else alive." This apparently sweeping statement is well-founded: most of the poets whose current work is deemed significant were disciples of his. Eliot got his start when Pound published Catholic Anthology "with the sole purpose of getting sixteen pages of Eliot into print at once," and Pound's maeutic efforts on The Waste Land are well known. Yeat's later poetry owes much of its tone to his influence. Robert Frost's poetry was first published through his efforts. William Carlos Williams and e e cummings often sat at his feet in "the pleasing attitudes of discipleship" - frequently in extreme discomfort. Amy Lowell, the "demon saleswoman", as Eliot called her, was of the group, although Pound broke with her when she tried to turn Imagisme into a "democratic beergarden." Everyone knows how Joyce managed to find a London publisher through Pound, and how the latter helped him in serialising the Portrait of the Artist and Ulysses in the little magazines with which he was connected. And Auden has spoken for the generation who came after Pound - "there are few living poets...who could say, 'My work would be exactly the same if Mr. Pound had never lived.'" Some of Pound's insistence on the importance of various

contemporaries is today somewhat empty, and some of his omissions are puzzling; but the vast bulk is still pertinent. It would be dangerous to prophesy that his criticism will one day be regarded as standing in the same class as that of Coleridge and Dryden; we are too close to it to be able to place it in the proper perspective. But it must be acknowledged that his discoveries and his principles have, almost alone, determined the path which modern poetry has followed.

In Make it New Pound set out the functions of criticism as he had discovered them to be:

"1. Theoretically it tries to forerun composition, to serve as gunsight, though there is, I believe, no recorded instance of the foresight having ever been of the slightest use save to actual composers. I mean the man who formulates any forward reach of co-ordinating principle is the man who produces the demonstration.

The others who use the principle learn usually from the example, and in most cases merely dim and dilute it.

I think it will usually be found that the work outruns the formulated or at any rate the published equation, or at most they proceed as two feet of one biped.

2. Excernment. The general ordering and weeding out of what has been actually performed. The elimination of repetitions.....The ordering of knowledge so that the next man (or generation) can most readily find the live part of it, and waste the least possible time among obsolete issues."

5

The Spirit of Romance bears ample evidence that Pound had already in 1910 discovered certain qualities - clarity, concision, lack of diffuseness - in foreign poetry, for the most part neglected by English writers, which played obvious rôles in the excellence of that poetry. Judging that contemporary English verse was in the doldrums, he determined to bring about an importation of those qualities; in 1912 he could say that the writing of the future, as he saw it, would be "harder and saner", "moving against poppycock", "free from slither", and "closer to the bone". Whether he was

correct in his attempt to re-orientate the poetry of the time, only time will be able to tell; but the fact remains that he had the courage to print his (then) heretical assumptions and the confidence to try and bring everyone else round to his view. His 'gunsights' did, almost without exception, 'forerun the composition' of the day - those compositions which were at all new. Many of the articles which acted as gunsights are necessarily now of little practical application, since their lessons have been learned; but their significance in the movement away from the grip of Victorianism remains an important factor to be appreciated in the study of the history of the art.

His teaching, which takes the form of pronouncements on the art of poetry, forms possibly the best handbook which the practising writer can have. The arrogance which many people see in his sharp, authoritative statements is really the assurance of a man who knows what he is talking about, and who wants to make his readers think. This also accounts for the highly compressed style of most of his prose - a style which does not allow of 'skimming the surface' to get the meaning.

Without exception, his attacks on other writers are backed up with textual illustrations and comparisons. Feeling that English verse needed something more than Heaven Hounding Francis Thompson in scores of adjectives, something more than nostalgic yearnings after Grantchester expressed in mushy language - although never for a moment condemning the feelings which the poets tried to communicate - he tried to find what was good in earlier poetry and to make English writers appreciate its goodness. Focussing

attention on individual authors and on specific fields of literature in which certain peaks of given skills had occurred, he fixed upon three basic qualities:

"MELOPOEIA, wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning.

PHANOPOEIA, which is a casting of images on the visual imagination.

LOGOPOEIA, 'the dance of the intellect among words', that is to say, it employs words not only for their direct meaning, but it takes count in a special way of habits of usage, of the context we expect to find with the word...It holds the aesthetic content which is peculiarly the domain of verbal manifestation, and cannot possibly be contained in plastic or in music."

6

Although this definition was written in 1931, Pound had long before found the pages where, in his opinion, the three were concentrated: his "furore over Arnaut Daniel" had started while he was at College, and the various translations of and essays on Anglo-Saxon, Catullus, Sappho, Flaubert, Villon, Gautier, Stendhal, Dante et al flowed out in a stream from 1908 onwards.

His well-known attacks on Milton are among those pieces which were needed when they were written, but which have become a little dated. Pound himself has been censured for this particular sphere of criticism as much as for anything else he ever wrote, and mostly by people who fail to notice what it is in Milton that he was decrying and who find it reprehensible that great names should be sniped at, however just the accusations might be. Clearly, any man bringing about a revolution in the craft of writing must of necessity find fault with figures previously held irreproachable. Pound gives Milton credit for exploiting the sonority of English verse with the use of the 'paragraph', but attacks him for writing English as if

it were Latin; "Him who disobeys me disobeys" is dangerous because uninspired writers imitate the method and turn it into a tyrannical system, while poor critics accept the system as a norm and discourage deviations from it; it is pernicious because it abuses the natural form of the language.

Throughout Pound's writing one finds a fierce insistence on the regarding of poetry as an art, something to be worked at, something which does not simply 'flow' but which has to be controlled and disciplined. Recognising that the aspiring poet should be in a position to study and appreciate examples of poetry which could teach him something, Pound set those interested to learning from the examples which had helped him, and encouraged them to find new fields and new authors. What those who criticised the lists in How to Read and similar 'manuals' failed to realise was that the omissions which irritated them were deliberate: Pound has always refused to do all the work for his readers.

He has also never really made any strict systematisation of his critical principles beyond the few early hints which follow, believing that systems "become tyrants overnight" and kill off originality. Various literary historians see in this a fault, which they never trouble to explain, and contend that his demand for continually renewed originality on the part of contemporary writers becomes, in retrospect, empty and meaningless. But 'making it new' was not a demand for complete originality, which is impossible in poetry; rather, Pound was demanding a renouncement of those critical and poetic principles which had given rise to the type of poetry he rejected; an injection into

modern poetry of techniques which, although not new, would revivify the art; and the adoption of a critical method - his own - which avoided the dryasdust source-hunting and irrelevant philological exercises of the academicians, and which necessitated close textual examination, penetration of the writer's sense, and competent exposition and assessment of the techniques which the writer used.

The categories into which criticism could be divided he set out as follows:

- "1. Criticism by discussion, extending from mere yatter, logic-chopping, and description of tendencies up to the clearly-defined record of procedures and an attempt to formulate more or less general principles....."
2. Criticism by translation.
3. Criticism by exercise in the style of a given period.....We can assume that until a man can actually control a given set of procedures there must be many elements in them of which he has but an imperfect knowledge...
4. Criticism via music, meaning definitely the setting of a poet's words...this is the most intense form of criticism save:
5. Criticism in new composition. For example the criticism of Seneca in Mr. Eliot's Agon is infinitely more alive, more vigorous than in his essay on Seneca."

"The most intense form"; Pound set Villon to music in his opera "Villon" (he himself directed a production of the work in Rapallo in 1926, and the B.B.C. broadcast it in 1932), and did the same thing for Guido and Sordello in a second opera, "Cavalcanti". In 1910 and 1911 he collaborated with Walter Morse Rummel in setting several Chaucerian songs, and some of his own troubadour lyrics. As for "criticism in new composition" the Homage to Sextus Propertius implies a more profound insight into that poet's sense and feeling than a good many Professors of Classics were capable of forming. I have dealt with the second and third categories in the chapter on Pound's translations; it remains to amplify the first:

- "1. The critic most worth respect is the one who actually causes an improvement in the art he criticises.
2. The best critic of next rank is the one who most focuses attention on the best work.
3. The pestilence masking itself as a critic distracts attention from the best work, either to secondary work that is more or less 'good' or to tosh, to detrimental work, dead or living snobisms, or to indefinite essays on criticism."

8

This is not very far from being a truism, but it is worth quoting if only to class Pound's status as a critic; having made the overt act of faith in declaring that poetry at the turn of the century was bad and that it had to be improved, he set out to do the job with indefatigable enthusiasm.

Clarity is a virtue which few critics pioneering new advances and techniques are able to claim. The use of vague, general terms conceals the critic's meaning and very often induces the reader to agree with his statements when in other circumstances he would not normally do so. Pound avoids this danger by defining his terms throughout; he never fails to say what his personal 'ideograph' of the good is. He states that such and such particular works seem to him to be 'good', 'best', 'indifferent', 'valid', or 'non-valid'. He does not talk 'around the matter', but gets to the point and makes the reader think for himself by using the 'method of Science', the ideographic method which Fenollosa's Essay defined for him. The essay gave him a name for the method which he had actually been using for some time: in an article in The Egoist in 1913 he tried to show certain qualities in given pieces of writing by using a sort of 'ideograph':

"Aristotle will tell you that 'The apt use of metaphor, being as it is, the swift perception of relations, is the true hall-mark of genius'. That abundance, that readiness of the figure

is indeed one of the surest proofs that the mind is upborne on the emotional surge...There is another poignancy which I do not care to analyse into component parts, if, indeed, such vivisection is possible...It is such phrasing as we find in

Era gl'a l'ora che volge il disio  
Ai naviganti...

Or the opening of the ballata which begins  
Perch'io non spero di tornar già mai  
Ballatetta, in Toscana.

Or:

S'ils n'ayment fors que pour l'argent,  
On ne les ayme que pour l'heure.

Or, in its context:

The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs,

Or, in its so different setting,

Ne maeg werigmod wyrde widhstondan  
ne se hreo hyge helpe gefremman:  
for dhon domgeorne dreorigne oft  
in hyra breostcofan bindath faeste."

9

The reader was left to work out, with the help of the exhibits, just why Pound considered them worthy of citation.

Believing that the best critic could only be the one who caused an improvement in the art, he advised young poets to pay no attention to the strictures of men who had not themselves written any notable original work. With the background of his own poetic experience behind him, he could afford to make advisory statements such as the following:

"Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but have the decency either to acknowledge the debt outright, or try to conceal it. Don't allow 'influence' to mean merely that you mop up the particular decorative vocabulary of some one or two poets whom you happen to admire..."

"It is not necessary that a poem should rely on its music, but if it does rely on its music that music must be such as will delight the expert."

"The musician can rely on pitch and the volume of the orchestra. You can not. The term harmony is misapplied in poetry; it refers to simultaneous sounds of different pitch. There is, however, in the best verse a sort of residue of sound which

remains in the ear of the hearer and acts more or less as an organ-base."

10

Perhaps the most concentrated piece of advice he ever wrote is to be found in an early letter to Harriet Monroe; it applies as much today as it ever did:

"...Poetry must be as well written as prose. Its language must be a fine language, departing in no way from speech save by a heightened intensity. There must be no book words, no periphrases, no inversions...

Rhythm must have meaning. It can't be a careless dash off, with no real grip and no hold to the words and sense...

There must be no clichés, set phrases, stereotyped journalese. The escape from such is by precision, a result of concentrated attention to what one is writing...

Objectivity and again objectivity, and expression: no hindsides-beforeness, no straddled adjectives (as 'addled mosses dank'), no Tennysonianness of speech; nothing, nothing that you couldn't, in some circumstance, in the stress of some emotion, actually say. Every literaryism, every book word, fritters away a scrap of the reader's patience, a scrap of his sense of your sincerity...

Language is made out of concrete things. General expressions in non-concrete terms are a laziness; they are talk, not art, not creation. They are the reaction of things on the writer, not a creative act by the writer..."

11

He divided writers into categories:

"When you start searching for 'pure elements' in literature you will find that literature has been created by the following classes of persons:

1. Inventors. Men who found a new process, or whose extant work gives us the first known example of a process.
2. The masters. Men who combined a number of such processes, and who used them as well as or better than the inventors.
3. The diluters. Men who came after the first two kinds of writer, and couldn't do the job quite as well.
4. Good writers without salient qualities...who are fortunate enough to be born when the literature of a given country is in good working order, or when some particular branch of writing is 'healthy'...
5. Writers of belles-lettres...
6. Starters of crazes."

12

The diluters, he recognised, produce the great bulk of all writing; and it was to them particularly that he

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10. "A Few Don'ts", Poetry, March 1913. Reprinted in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, pp.5-6.

11. The Letters of Ezra Pound, p.91.

12. ABC of Reading, p.39.

addressed his lessons:

"...of these the delightful anthologies, the song books, are full, and choice among them is a matter of taste, for if you prefer Wyatt to Donne, Donne to Herrick, Drummond of Hawthornden to Browne, in response to some purely personal sympathy, these people add but some slight personal flavour, some minor variant of a mode, without affecting the main course of the story."

13

Those who think Pound obviously 'doesn't know what he is talking about' in the above paragraph should realise that he based his assessments not on a knowledge of English poetry alone, but on a broad and detailed first-hand knowledge of European literature. His insistence on the value of music as elucidation of verse is also disparaged at times by those who fail to realise that an attempt to set a poem to music demands the full attention of the setter on the words of the poem. Any superfluous words are immediately discovered. It was for this reason, among others, that Pound advised young poets to learn music.

Just as he was one of the first to realise that poetry is an art and not just 'something you're born with', so he was one of the first critics of this century to realise that poetry is a time art:

"Rhythm is a form cut into TIME, as a design is determined SPACE.  
A melody is a rhythm in which the pitch of each element is fixed by the composer...In making a line of verse (and thence building the lines into passages) you have certain primal elements...the various 'articulate sounds' of the language, of its alphabet, that is, and the various groups of letters in syllables. These syllables have  
A. Original weights and durations  
B. Weights and durations that seem naturally imposed on them by the other syllable groups around them.

Those are the mediums (sic) wherewith the poet cuts his designs in time...  
The writer of bad verse is a bore because he does not perceive time and time relations, and cannot therefore delimit them in an interesting manner"

14

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13. How to Read, p.17.  
14. ABC of Reading, pp.198-9.

The fruit of this realisation is visible in Mauberley and some of the Cantos, in their intricate rhythmic structure. It is indubitably one of the pronouncements he has made which will retain significance for poets writing in the future; and that is perhaps the most important aspect of Pound's criticism. What he has said is of permanent value to practitioners and students of the art, because he went to the roots of poetry, to the heart of it; finding out what made it different from other arts; because he tested his discoveries in his own poetry; and because, finding his experiments successful, he guided other writers to his sources and gave them the benefit of his knowledge and experience. "A lot of my prose scribbling," he wrote to a friend, "is simply 'there digge.'"

Throwing open the gates to fields of poetic technique neglected or forgotten in England, he showed how English poetry could be enriched by a wider knowledge of the whole art. Writers whose knowledge of Provençal song, early Italian verse-forms, and other sensibilities previously untapped has helped them with their poetry have his critical faculty to thank; the same faculty which could recognise good writing which was also new writing - something very few critics are able or courageous enough to do. And that part of his critical corpus which was more pertinent to the needs of the time in which it was written, is valuable today both for an understanding of the literary problems of that time, and for an appreciation of what Eliot has called "the revolution of taste and practice which he has brought about."

It should be stressed that Pound's didacticism never degenerates into a dogmatic laying-down-of-the-law, nor a set of absolute prohibitions. In "A Few

Don'ts" he warned readers to

"...consider the three propositions (demanding direct treatment, economy of words, and the sequence of the musical phrase), not as dogma - never consider anything as dogma - but as the result of long contemplation, which, even if it is someone else's contemplation, may be worth consideration."

15

His indications of what makes a given poem a great poem, and his consequent harping on that quality, are points of departure and signposts rather than absolute laws. In the article on Hueffer entitled "The Prose Tradition in Verse", published in Poetry in 1914, he pointed out that "it is the function of criticism to find what a given work is, rather than what it is not." If one qualify this definition by adding to it one which he made in the "Date Line" essay - "Let it stand that the function of criticism is to efface itself when it has established its dissociations" - a fair picture of his theory of criticism arises. This theory and its application can best be understood and appreciated when Pound's poetry is read alongside his prose; and his poetry can best be assessed when it is read with his criticism.

But for all his insistence on style and technique, Pound is not simply a mere technician. It is true that nowhere in his criticism does he speak of the poetic imagination; his attacks on Milton are not directed against that poet's theme, but against his method. He shows an astonishing lack of interest in what is being said by the writers he discusses: for instance, in the ABC of Reading, setting out one of his lists for 'required reading', he advises students to read at least "a book and a half" of Stendhal. Elsewhere

he recommends the first few chapters of Flaubert's Bouvard et Pécuchet. His assessments of a given technique are hardly coloured by the writer's content - because he believes that 'matter and manner' are, in works of art worth study, inseparable. A way of saying something becomes itself the thing said. At this stage the critic usually protests that for this very reason Pound must be a technician, and nothing else; failing to see that no artist can in reality be interested in style alone. No sculptor, painter, or musician can be interested in technique at the expense of his subject. The question turns on what one thinks the function of literature to be, and Pound's answer is straightforward. In his view, "artists are the antennae of the race"; and literature must be kept in a healthy state in order that the 'race' may remain healthy. He saw himself as the one man who could lead the crusade for healthy writing, who could 'wrench his contemporaries' impulses into art'. "To Whistler, American" shows, in connection with this, some points which characterise Pound's critical writing: the first has already been mentioned - the projection of the fanatical artist, careless of practically everything except the health of his art. The second is his indirect iconoclasm: not always intended, it usually takes the form of a merciless laying-bare of the faults of some accepted literary 'great'. Less often he seems to take a diabolical delight in picking holes in certain poets simply to deflate them and to try and turn the current of admiring praise to someone else; but here again he never tears down without justification. Third is his spasmodic desire to associate himself with great men; frequently he sets himself up on a pedestal with figures whom he openly admires. Not least important is the

fourth aspect - that of the martyr in the cause of art, the symbolic figure who at once suffers for his followers and his beliefs, and at the same time vindicates those beliefs by showing the way to success and perfection. All of these are linked directly with his concern for the health of literature as a whole; but there is one other aspect which deserves attention - Pound's obvious Americanism.

EPILOGUE: AMERICA A-SINGING.

"'Americanism is a fine  
thing!'  
'Yes, fine - but who's  
going to define  
Americanism?'"

(Thurber: The Male Animal)

Saying in a letter to Miss Monroe that he considered Whistler "our only great artist", Pound referred to "To Whistler, American" in these words:

"...even this informal salute, drastic as it is, may not be out of place at the threshold of what I hope is an endeavour to carry into our American poetry the same sort of life and intensity which he infused into modern painting." 1

He allies himself with Whistler, the "delicate, classical Master", who tried in the face of critics like Ruskin to rid pictorial art of literary qualities; Pound too, had "tested and pried and worked in many fashions" to get extraneous matter out of poetry. But the poem is more concerned with America than with art for art's sake; Pound is trying to "wrench her impulse into art", sublimely sure that his way is the right way, and finding himself thwarted by the "mass of dolts" still wallowing in the narrowness of provincial thought and feeling. Whistler, the expatriate American, appealed to him because he attained the highest mastery, not only by a natural facility, but also by constant labour and searching. The exhibition of his work at the Tate in September of 1912, which immediately 'inspired' the poem, contained not only the celebrated 'Nocturnes' but work in many styles - pastels of Greek motif, one Pre-Raphaelite picture, and work after the Spanish and Japanese models. His 'life struggle', so to speak, was before the spectator, and Pound saw the similarity

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1. The Letters of Ezra Pound, p.44.

between their careers: both had struggled in one direction until they had either achieved their goal or had found it inadequate for their expression. Whistler's excellence was all the more remarkable to Pound because he realised the magnitude of the drawbacks and hindrances Whistler had had to fight against, having encountered them himself. An enormous amount of Pound's writing is concerned with his attempts to establish the 'great tradition' in America, to make it a country to be reckoned with in the world of art, and to rid it of the parochial standards of value which he saw were stifling genuine innovation there. He chose Whistler in preference to Whitman, who was well on the way to becoming a symbol of the American 'tone', because Whitman failed to measure up to the mark Pound set as a criterion:

"...you cannot call a man an artist until he shows himself capable of reticence and of restraint, until he shows himself in some degree master of the forces which beat upon him." 2

Except for Whistler, Whitman and Henry James, Pound could think of no artist worth study with a degree of American sensibility in his work. The accepted American writers, like Poe, Irving, Hawthorne and Longfellow were products of purely colonial conditions; their tradition was "English unalloyed".

While he almost always concentrated on the need for attention to the state of Art with a capital A, much of this wider criticism is implied in his opinions of circumstances in the United States. He gives his opinions of the intellectual climate in that country in "L'Homme Moyen Sensuel", which appeared in The Little Review in 1917. 'L'homme' is a typical American pseudo-intellectual named Radway, who has no

ideas of his own ; those which he does have, have been drummed into him by his mother, and his standards of value are those of the influential people he meets. Radway ends up in a "Baptist Broadway Temple", a "pillar in/ An organization for the suppression of sin..."; his motive is financial - "'Twas as a business asset pure and simple...". "O state sans song," Pound wails,

".....sans home-grown wine, sans realist!  
Tell me not in mournful wish-wash  
Life's a sort of sugared dish-wash!"

Elsewhere Pound listed the 'machinery to hand' in America:

- "1. Art schools and their students, creative artists in all the media, from paint to music and letters.
2. Universities, with endowment and with provisions for fellowships in the dissection of every dead matter, and no provisions whatever for the fostering of the creative energies.
3. The Press. The daily and Sunday Press and the ten and fifteen cent magazines.  
...the so-called 'better' magazines...are more filled with intellectual stagnation than a University graduate school classroom, and they fear the vital and renovating strata of letters more than they would fear beri-beri and the noisiesomest pestilence."

3

He points out that these assets are dissociated<sup>4</sup> and because they have no commerce with each other they are quite useless, in that they do not allow the artist to receive refreshing ideas from his colleagues. It is possible that an artist completely isolated from fresh ideas and lacking contact with other artists might produce significant work, but it is highly improbable. It is not enough that the man with an urge to create have only the impulse to create: he must be in a position to know what has been done and what is yet to be done, so that he can avoid useless repetition. The Vorticists realised this, and much of their time was spent in gleaning new ideas from artists practising in

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3. Patria Mia, pp.81-2.

4. N.B. The period under discussion is that c.1900-1920.

other media. The ideal place for this desired vortex of the arts is the metropolis; some central capital where interaction of ideas between active artists can take place. America before 1920 had no such capital, no place by which it could be tested, no place which was saying at a given time something which would be said an appreciable time later somewhere else. The value of a capital, Pound realised, is that

"...if a man in a capital cribs, quotes or imitates, someone else immediately lets the cat out of the bag and says he is cribbing, quoting or imitating."

5

He saw London as a potential vortex of this kind; in the United States, however, he saw the 'lines of force' running from New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis and San Francisco, encouraging decentralisation of the artistic impulse and a parochial standard of criticism. The little poem "N.Y.", written about 1912, directs its irony at this state of affairs:

"My City, my beloved, my white! Ah, slender,  
Listen! Listen to me, and I will breathe into  
thee a soul.  
Delicately upon the reed, attend me!  
Now do I know that I am mad,  
For here are a million people surly with traffic;  
This is no maid.  
Neither could I play upon any reed if I had one.  
My City, my beloved,  
Thou art a maid with no breasts,  
Thou art slender as a silver reed.  
Listen to me, attend me!  
And I will breathe into thee a soul,  
And thou shalt live forever."

One of the results of the decentralisation was the impregnable impassivity of editors and critics when confronted with anything in the least 'new'. The aspiring writer, needing someone to tell him exactly what he felt and meant, to direct his poetic instincts into some channel of technique and to advise him to

"...Say it as briefly as possible and avoid all

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5. "The Renaissance", in Poetry, 1914. Reprinted in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, p.214.

sham of ornament. Learn what technical excellence you can from a direct study of the masters, and pay no attention to the suggestions of anyone who has not himself produced notable work in poetry.."

6

found his work rejected by editors who had been brought up to respect eighteenth-century fashions, and who never once considered any fundamental issue of art or of aesthetics; who never made any a priori judgments and who demanded compliance with old, worn-out formulae and attention to 'conventional form', who had no interest whatever in ascertaining whether new things, living things, seeking for expression, had found for themselves new and fitting modes of expression.

"Never once does the editor ask himself the only question which the critic has a right to ask himself in weighing a work of art, to wit: Is this man a serious artist? Does this work present what the artist intended it to present, effectively? Does it comply with the laws inherent in itself? Does the manner fit close the matter? There is no interest whatever in the art of poetry, as a living art, an art changing and developing, always the same at root, never the same in appearance for two decades in succession."

7

There were at the time no magazines in America comparable with Hueffer's English Review, the Mercure de France, The Athenaeum, The New Statesman, The Egoist or Poetry and Drama; the leading periodicals in the States were The Atlantic, The Century, and Harpers - all highly respected and very decrepit, never straying an inch from the literary style of 1870. Pound realised that living art and these prosperous magazines were ultimately incompatible, it being the business of the artist to tell the truth whoever might be offended, and the business of the editor to maintain his circulation. "Over all there swells the appalling fungus of our 'better magazines'"; it is, of course,

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6. Patria Mia, p.43.

7. Ibid. p.46.

perfectly possible for the arts to thrive in the midst of popular ignorance - but when the organs spreading the evidence of the arts are bad, the populace remains ignorant and the arts are stifled. Pound saw that the crux of the matter lay in the fact that the editor wanted that type of writing which would suit the scheme of his issue: "magazine technique consists in the conforming to certain formulae."

Another evil lay in the American publishing laws. Under these laws any book printed overseas and imported into the country was liable to a heavy customs duty unless it was 'commercial'; anything connected with scholarship, the arts, belles-lettres and so on was subject to a 25% tax, payable by the American seller, who naturally raised the price of the book to cover his losses. Pound mentions in a letter to John Quinn, the lawyer who helped obtain the injunction against the pirating of Joyce's Ulysses, that Hugo Rennert's Life of Lope de Vega, a standard work which "got him into the Spanish Academy", had been subjected to a "huge" duty. It was also impossible to get a book printed in America unless it conformed to the commercial requirements set down by the trade; thus American authors were very frequently in the unenviable position of having to have their work published in Europe and then losing money on its appearance in their own country. "The American law as it stands," Pound complained, "is all for the publisher and printer and all against the author, and more and more against him just in such proportion as he is before or against his time." He discovered an American bookseller selling his Spirit of Romance, which had cost 6/- in England, at \$2.50, after having bought it at 3/- by special trade arrangement. This sort of iniquity and legal stupidity was

enough to keep most books by living, significant authors out of the reach of the American 'learner-poet'. Even in 1934 the position was such that Pound could say

"In another thirty years perhaps the gross idiocy of two decades of publishers will also be more apparent. I mean their shortsightedness; and particularly their policy of debasing the literary coin to a point where it no longer deceives even the gulls. Trade had save in inferior imitations of Edgar Wallace, because greed of immediate profit blinded them to the necessity of keeping alive just a wee bit of inventiveness, of fostering just enough good seed corn for new crop, of cherishing just that little extra bit of perception, just that bit of unwanted honesty that divides say McAlmon from Sinclair Lewis, and makes the latter so acceptable to the boob... It is not the vox populi. One is inclined to talk of popular taste, when one should hunt for the chaps working the oracle." 8

It is not surprising that with these disabilities hindering its native development, American letters tended to 'follow' the passé fashions of London and Paris. What actual news of fresh modes of expression reached the American artist was diluted until it had no practical value at all. The artist was removed from the sources, from the few dynamic people who really knew good from bad. The position in the Universities was not much better; Eliot has written with sarcasm that undergraduates at Harvard in his time "read the English poets of the '90s who were dead", and that that was the closest the student came to learning anything about contemporary writing or the living tradition. Pound said in 1913

"I detest an education which tends to separate a man from his fellows. For the humanities rightly taught can but give more points of contact with other men." 9

American Universities had imitated the German system of thesis-writing for graduate students, but the theses produced were largely on recondite and useless themes.

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8. "Date Line"; introductory essay to Make it New.  
Reprinted in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, p.81.

9. Patria Mia, p.61.

A requirement demanded by all Universities was that the thesis be an original contribution to some field of knowledge, but no real attempt was made at synthesising the knowledge so obtained.

Thus literature in America remained static and uninformed. It suffered, in Pound's words, from "dry-rot, magazitis." It had five fronts, as far as he could see:

"There is the 'school of virility', or 'red blood'; it seems to imagine that man is differentiated from the lower animals by possession of the phallus...

There is the 'gorgeous school', following the respective worsts of Kipling and of Swinburne. Their aim is, it seems, to name as many constellations and to encumber them with as many polysyllabic adjectives as possible, appropriate or inappropriate.

There is the sociological school, which repeats in weak verse the ideas expressed in last year's magazines.

...under similar banner the post-Whitmanians. Now Whitman was not an artist, but a reflex...in an age of papier-mâché letters....his followers take no count of the issue that an honest reflex of 1912 will result in something utterly different from the reflex of 1865.

There is about the feet of all these splashers the school of 'normal production', i.e. those who fill pages with nice domestic sentiments inoffensively versified." 10

All this with the result, Pound saw, of stultifying the genuine creative energy existing in the American artist to the detriment of the reputation of American letters overseas. As far as civilisation was concerned, he held, America was the great, rich Western province which had sent one or two notable artists to the Eastern capital - not Rome, of course, but the double capital of London and Paris.

In Poetry (Chicago) he saw a chance to carry across to America the current critical ideas. Other similar 'little magazines' were started - Dial, Seven Arts, etc., - but they were unable to get contributors of the quality Pound induced to write for Poetry, and

and they very soon descended to a pandering to popular taste. In 1914 he contributed a series of short essays to Poetry in which he set out his plans for the revivification of American letters. (Patria Mia, written in 1912-13 on the same lines in more detail, embodying earlier essays and points raised in some of his letters, had been lost when its prospective publishers ended partnership. It was found in 1950.). The first requirements for an artistic renaissance he took to be enthusiasm and propaganda. The American artist had quite enough of the former, and Pound was prepared to provide the latter. He saw that architecture as an art was emerging in the States from its embryonic stage; and he recognised the American flair for scholarship; given these,

"The thesis I defend is: that America has a chance for Renaissance and that certain absurdities in the manners of American action are, after all, things of the surface and of necessity not the symptoms of sterility or even of fatal disease." 11

In the letter to Harriet Monroe accepting her offer of the post of foreign correspond of Poetry he added a significant postscript:

"Any agonizing that tends to hurry what I believe in the end to be inevitable, our American Risorgimento, is dear to me. That awakening will make the Italian Renaissance look like a tempest in a teapot! The force we have, and the impulse, but the guiding sense, the discrimination in applying the force, we must wait and strive for." 12

In the same letter he asked her

"Are you for American poetry or for poetry? The latter is more important, but it is important that America should boost the former...The glory of any nation is to produce art that can be exported without disgrace to its origin."

Throughout his association with the magazine Pound was constantly warning her against being content with a parochial standard, against placating the public at

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11. Ibid. p.24.

12. The Letters of Ezra Pound, p.44.

the expense of the serious artist; and exhorting her to support the "young American poets with a serious determination to produce master-work" and to print, along with the best that these poets had to offer, the best foreign writing, "or the experiments that seem serious, and seriously and sanely directed toward the broadening and development of the Art of Poetry."

To combat the wilful shortsightedness of the "literary bureaucracy" in both London and the States, he helped many American writers to get their work printed, either by pushing it into Poetry or by starting private publishing ventures especially designed for the purpose. With regard to the stupid and unfair publishing laws he wrote to the President of the United States and to Quinn, who was responsible for the tariff law which broke up the American market in faked Old Masters, and urged them to do something about the position. But his concern with the status quo in America was obvious in his plans for injecting new life into the Universities and the Press. He suggested in innumerable letters and articles that graduate seminars be reorganised to include, together with the students and teachers, some practising artist. The thesis system he held to be sound in essence, but lacking in synthesis; he suggested that synopses of theses be published in "literary magazines", and that every so often some attempt be made to synthesise the contributions made to knowledge in these essays. To make some effort towards the establishment of a metropolis in America, he suggested the endowment of individual artists, who would be obliged to pass on the endowments when they had obtained the recognition which would enable them to stand on their own feet. The recipients would be chosen by the **artists** themselves. A

somewhat naïve plan, but some way had to be found to keep the young artists alive during the period in which they were learning their craft and in which their work was yet unnoticed by the critics. These endowments should, Pound said, be given for study in some city having good collections of significant pictures, progressive periodicals and so on - other artists would flock around and the vortex would grow naturally.

The plan for the re-arranged graduate seminar would have several results: the consulting artist, confronted with scholars, would be driven to regarding his art as Art; the students, besides coming to regard literature as something living, something capable of constant transformation and rebirth, would be provided with a means for observing the difference between the dilettante and the serious artist: the scheme would offer a microcosmic example of what would normally happen in the metropolis, where the best artists and scholars would occasionally meet by accident.

Another proposal was the 'super-college', to be run on the lines of the American Academy in Rome, but on a much larger scale:

"A hundred men, in New York or Chicago, kept to work at painting, sculpture, architecture, musical composition and all branches of literature ...would be a reasonable beginning." 13

The men chosen would be those who had already shown ability and serious intent, and they would be picked by artists. There would be no formal instruction, and foreign artists would be paid to come "and loaf about and converse with such of the younger men who should prove sufficiently intelligent to be conversed with." Pound hazarded a prophecy that if any great city in America should "tether" a hundred young men chosen for

their inventive faculties and not for their capacity to agree with editorial boards, that city would in two decades become the centre of occidental art. He actually tried to start such a "College of Arts" in London, specifically for American students prevented by the Great War from visiting continental centres. (See Appendix D.)

In effect, the goal was that the American artist should be conversant with current trends in London and Paris - not so that he should make imitations of London and Paris models, but in order that he should not

"...waste his lifetime making unconscious, or semi-conscious, imitations of French and English models thirty or forty or an hundred years old." 14

With this in mind, he proposed three lines of attack: first, that Americans should develop a criticism of art based on world-art, on the work of maximum excellence. The second was the direct subsidy of individual artists, to enable them to follow their ambitions "without needing to conciliate the ignorant en route"; and the third was the foundation of the centres described above. In "The Renaissance" he stated a belief later to become one of the ground-themes of the Cantos:

"When a civilisation is vivid it preserves and fosters all sorts of artists...when it is dull and anaemic it preserves a rabble of priests, sterile instructors, and repeaters of things second-hand." 15

The first duty of a nation "is to conserve its human resources," and he believed that when America understood this, she would supersede any nation attempting to conserve first its material resources; and it must be acknowledged that no artist has had more influence on the development of letters in America than Pound, the

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14. Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, p.214.

15. Ibid. p.226.

exile.

His poetry, too, has a peculiarly American tone. Not, of course, in the early volumes where the only tone noticeable was not much more than a pastiche of that of the writers he was imitating: but in the later work of Ripostes and on up to the Cantos one finds the energetic note, the dislike of sordidity, the desire to "make it new" which characterises Pound as American. He is, one could say, a poet in the 'line of action' as opposed to the 'line of dream'. He is also one of the very few poets whose expression is hardly at all dependent on environment. He believed that the American language as well as the American experience was fit for poetry, that it was vigorous and supple and tender enough "to be spoken by the gods." One of the last poets to write in the tradition which Pound rejected, Edward Arlington Robinson, once wrote of how Shakespeare

".....out of his  
Miraculous inviolable increase  
Fills Ilion, Rome, or any town you like  
Of olden time with timeless Englishmen."

Shakespeare sent his imagination travelling in time and space and was never anything but English to the core. Pound left America in disgust, travelled back to 12th.-century Provence, Augustan Rome, pre-Christian China and Greece and peopled them all with timeless Americans.

Sometimes the Americanism is evident in rather cheap tricks; he has Hyllos say of Herakles in his translation of Sophocles' Trachiniae <sup>16</sup>

"They say he's in Euboea,  
besieging Eurytusville  
or on the way to it."

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16. Women of Trachis. A version by Ezra Pound. London, Neville Spearman, 1956.

Imagine Shakespeare writing The Merchant of Veniceshire or Timon of Athensford. But ignoring similar devices, it must be admitted that more than Whitman, Emily Dickinson and even more than Eliot, Pound is the first really American poet; the first to have nothing to do with the tradition of English poetry, once he had found his feet. Comparing his more mature work with that of his predecessors and poetic ancestors, his is a completely new voice; and the newness, the colloquialism, the vigour, the seriousness, the originality and the insistence on making it new which compose the voice, are the American tone.

A detailed illustration of this particular thesis is impossible here; the proof of it is borne out indirectly in those places where I have quoted from his poetry. One single example of his freshness and economy, the language which is peculiarly his own, is the following passage from the Homage to Sextus Propertius:

"Annalists will continue to record Roman  
reputations,  
Celebrities from the Trans-Caucasus will belaud  
Roman celebrities  
And expound the distentions of Empire,  
But for a few pages brought down from the forked  
hill unsullied?  
I ask a wreath that will not crush my head.  
And there is no hurry about it;  
I shall have, doubtless, a boom after my funeral,  
Seeing that long standing increases all things  
regardless of quality."

As has been indicated above, the American note is perceptible from Ripostes, through Lustra and Cathay to Propertius and Mauberley and the Cantos. That aspect of it more closely associated with the tone of the 'American criticism' just discussed is arrestingly present in those poems which he intended as vehicles for propaganda against abuses of social ethics and of the artistic principles which he had adopted. In these poems the actual performance is no longer so important;

they are turned out with not much regard for language and without much perception. What is striking is the tone, Pound's attitude: the irreverent, slangy style which punches home his ideas:

"Upon learning that the mother wrote verses,  
And that the father wrote verses,  
And that the youngest son was in a publisher's  
office,  
And that the friend of the second daughter was  
undergoing a novel.  
The young American pilgrim  
Exclaimed:  
'This is a darn'd clever bunch!'"

("Soirée")

Here the effect lies in the repetition, the rhythm, and the bathetic admiration of the 'young pilgrim'. Compare with this the poem "The Rest", from Lustra:

"O helpless few in my country,  
O remnant enslaved!  
Artists broken against her,  
Astray, lost in the villages,  
Mistrusted, spoken-against,  
Lovers of beauty, starved,  
Thwarted with systems,  
Helpless against the control;  
...You of the finer sense,  
Broken against false knowledge,  
You who can know at first hand,  
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:  
Take thought:  
I have weathered the storm,  
I have beaten out my exile."

It is on this evidence somewhat bewildering to find critics of reputable stature accusing Pound, the poet and critic, of being un-American. Babette Deutsch inexplicably believes that his verse is just this; while in 1920 William Carlos Williams was somehow able to say that Pound was "the best enemy United States verse has."<sup>17</sup> In 1931 he had the grace to admit his mistake and realise that Pound left America, not strictly for pleasure, but to be able to breath, to live in an ambience more suited to the production of poetry; to

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17. Kora in Hell (Prologue).

find a centre more conducive to artistic creation than what Williams calls

"...the malignant stupidity of a generation which polluted our rivers and then, brightly, gave ten or twenty or any imaginable number of millions of dollars as a fund towards the perpetuation of Beauty - in the form of a bequest to the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art." 18

And what Pound said of Whistler may be justly applied to himself:

"It is all very well to say that Whistler was European, but it does not affect my argument. If a man's work require him to live in exile, let him suffer, or enjoy, his exile gladly. But it would be about as easy for an American to become a Chinaman or a Hindoo as for him to acquire an Englishness, or a Frenchness, or a European-ness that is more than half a skin deep." 19

It must be understood that Pound's desire for active, healthy art in America is not simply chauvinism. It is part of his greater desire for the health of Art in general; but it must also be remembered that in his opinion "artists are the antennae of the race", and that good literature

"...has to do with the clarity and vigour of 'any and every' thought and opinion. It has to do with maintaining the very cleanliness of the tools, the health of the very matter of thought itself. Save in the rare and limited instances of invention in the plastic arts, or in mathematics, the individual cannot think and communicate his thought, the governor and legislator cannot act effectively and frame his laws, without words, and the solidity and validity of these words is in the care of the damned and despised literati. When their work goes rotten - by that I do not mean when they express indecorous thoughts - but when their very medium, the very essence of their work, the application of word to thing goes rotten, i.e. becomes slushy and inexact, or excessive and bloated, the whole machinery of social and of individual thought and order goes to pot. This is a lesson of history, and a lesson not yet half learned." 20

Thus the artist, and especially the literary artist, has the health of civilisation in his care. It does

18. Selected Essays. New York, Random House, 1955.

19. Patria Mia, pp.64-5.

20. How to Read, p.14.

not matter whether "he desire the good of the race or acts merely from personal vanity" -

"The thing is mechanical in action. In proportion as his work is exact, i.e. true to human consciousness and to the nature of man, as it is exact in formulation of desire, so is it durable and so is it 'useful'; I mean it maintains the precision and clarity of thought, not merely for the benefit of a few dilettantes and 'lovers of literature', but maintains the health of thought outside literary circles and in non-literary circles and in non-literary existence, in general individual and communal life." 21

Pound's efforts have not been motivated by 'personal vanity.' He has shared his discoveries with all those who have cared to listen to him, and his present unenviable position is largely a result of his application of this intense desire for exact terminology to economic and political spheres, and his publication of the discoveries which he has made in these fields. Poetry is not an athletic exercise, and it is irrelevant to try and judge which poet runs the fastest, jumps the highest, or dives the deepest; but in a survey of modern poetry, it must be acknowledged that Pound stands alone in his concern for the health of the art. No other poet writing in English in this century has had such a profound effect on the course of writing; and in no other writer's work, both critical and poetic, are the reasons for this influence more clearly shown. The Cantos are mirrors of his earlier explorations and conclusions; whether the poem itself is a success or a failure is not immediately relevant. What should be recognised and understood is that Pound's writing up to the time of the Cantos is the best guide for the student who wishes to have a clear knowledge of what modern poetry is and why it took its particular course; and the best guide for the poet who wishes to learn about his art - because his poetry and his prose are mirrors, the one to the other.

APPENDIX A

The Noh play "Suma Genji", translated and finished  
by Pound from the notes of Fenollosa.

Characters.

SHITE - 'an old woodcutter, who is an apparition of  
the hero, GENJI, as a sort of place spirit,  
the spirit of the seashore at Suma.'

WAKI, FUJIWARA, 'a priest with a hobby for folklore,  
who is visiting sacred places.'

SECOND SHITE, 'or the SHITE in his second manner or  
apparition, GENJI'S spirit appearing in a  
sort of glory of waves and moonlight.'

WAKI (announcing himself)

I, Fujiwara no Okinori,  
Am come from over the sea from Hiuga;  
I am a priest from the shinto temple at Miyazaki,  
And, as I lived far afield,  
I could not see the temple of the great god at Ise;  
And now I am a-mind to go thither,  
And am come to Suma, the sea-board.  
Here Genji lived, and here I shall see the young cherry,  
The tree that is so set in the tales-

SHITE

And I am a woodcutter of Suma.  
I fish in the twilight;  
By day I pack wood and make salt.  
Here is the mount of Suma.  
There is the tree, the young cherry. 1  
And you may be quite right about Genji's having lived  
here. 2  
That blossom will flare in a moment.

WAKI

I must find out what that old man knows. (To SHITE.) Sir,  
you seem very poor, and yet you neglect your road; you  
stop on your way home, just to look at a flower. Is  
that the tree of the stories?

SHITE

I dare say I'm poor enough; but you don't know much if  
you're asking about that tree, 'Is it the fine tree of  
Suma?'

WAKI

Well, is it the tree? I've come on purpose to see it.

SHITE

What! you really have come to see the cherry-blossom,  
and not to look at Mount Suma?

WAKI

Yes; this is where Genji lived, and you are so old that  
you ought to know a lot of stories about him.

CHORUS (telling out Genji's thoughts)

If I tell over the days that are gone,  
My sleeve will wither. 3  
The past was at Kiritsubo;  
I went to the lovely cottage, my mother's,  
But the emperor loved me.  
I was made esquire at twelve, with the hat. The sooth-  
sayers unrolled my glories. I was called Hikaru Genji.

I was chujo in Hahakigi province. I was chujo in the land of the maple-feasting. At twenty-five I came to Suma, knowing all sorrow of seafare, having none to attend my dreams, no one to hear the old stories.

Then I was recalled to the city. I passed from office to office. I was naidaijin in Miwotsukushi, I was dajodaijin in the lands of Otome, and daijotenno 4 in Fufi no Uraba; for this I was called Hikam Kimi.

WAKI

But tell me exactly where he lived. Tell me all that you know about him.

SHITE

One can't place the exact spot; he lived all along here by the waves. If you will wait for the moonlight you might see it all in a mist.

CHORUS

He was in Suma in the old days-

SHITE (stepping behind a screen or making some sign of departure, he completes the sentence of the chorus)

-but now in the aery heaven.

CHORUS (to WAKI)

Wait and the moon will show him.  
That woodman is gone in the clouds.

WAKI

That 'woodman' was Genji himself, who was here talking live words. I will wait for the night. I will stay here to see what happens. (Announcing his act) Then Fujiwara no Okinori lay down and heard the waves filled with music.

SCENE 11 begins with the appearance of the SECOND SHITE, that is to say, a bright apparition of GENJI in supernatural form.

GENJI

How beautiful this sea is! When I trod the grass here I was called 'Genji the gleaming', and now from the vaulting heaven I reach down to set a magic on mortals. I sing of the moon in this shadow, here on the sea-marge of Suma. Here I will dance Sei-kai-ha, the blue dance of the sea waves.

(And then he begins to dance.)

CHORUS (accompanying and describing the dance)

The flower of waves-reflected  
Is on his white garment;  
That pettern covers the sleeves.  
The air is alive with flute-sounds,  
With the song of various pipes  
The land is a-quiver,  
And even the wild sea of Suma

Is filled with resonant quiet.  
Moving in clouds and in rain,  
The dream overlaps with the real;  
There was a light out of heaven,  
There was a young man at the dance here;  
Surely it was Genji Hikaru,  
It was Genji Hikaru in spirit.

GENJI

My name is known to the world;  
Here by the white waves was my dwelling;  
But I am come down out of sky  
To put my glamour on mortals.

CHORUS

Gracious is the presence of Genji,  
It is like the feel of things at Suma.

GENJI (referring also to a change in the dance)

The wind is abated.

CHORUS

A thin cloud-

GENJI

-clings to the clear-blown sky.  
It seems like the spring-time.

CHORUS

He came down like Brahma, Indra, and the Four Kings  
Visiting the abode of Devas and Men. 5  
He, the soul of the place. 6  
He, who seemed but a woodman,  
Flashed with the honoured colours,  
He the true-gleaming.  
Blue-grey is the garb they wear here,  
Blue-grey he fluttered in Suma;  
His sleeves were like the grey sea-waves;  
They moved with curious rustling,  
Like the noise of the restless waves,  
Like the bell of a country town  
'Neath the night-fall.

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1. N.B. Properties are not representational but symbolic. In effect the actor says, 'Pretend that is the tree.'
  2. Double-entente. The blossom will really come out; it is a day of anniversary; also Genji will appear in his proper glory, as the audience knows.
  3. i.e. this present manifestation in the shape of an old man will fade.
  4. Chujo, naidaijin, etc. - names for different grades of office.
  5. The Four Kings, i.e. of the four points of the compass. Devas (spirits) and Men occupy the position just below the Gods.
  6. More precisely 'He became the place'.

APPENDIX B

- I. A poem in Chinese characters, with Pound's notes.  
(Plate 1 in Fenollosa's Essay.)
- II. An illustration of Pound's misreading of certain Chinese characters.
- III. Two translations of a poem by Li Po. The first by W.J.Fletcher (1933); the second by Pound (1915).

月 耀 如 晴 雪  
梅 花 似 照 是

可 憐 金 鏡 轉  
庭 上 玉 芳 馨

The meaning of each ideograph in this poem is set out below:

MOON RAYS LIKE PURE SNOW  
PLUM FLOWERS RESEMBLE BRIGHT STARS  
CAN ADMIRE GOLD DISC TURN  
GARDEN HIGH-ABOVE JEWEL WEEDS FRAGRANT.

Pound glosses each character as follows (stating that Fenollosa left the notes unfinished, and that he, Pound, is proceeding "in ignorance and by conjecture").

Moon = sun disc with the moon's horns.  
Rays = bright, + feathers over flying.  
Like = woman plus mouth.  
Pure = sun plus azure sky.  
Snow = rain + broom, over cloud-roof or cloth over falling drops.

Plum = tree, plus crooked over female breast.  
Flowers = man plus spoon, under plants. Flowers at height of man's head.  
Resemble = man plus try.  
Bright = sun, plus knife over mouth, all over fire.  
Stars = sun over bright. (Bright here = fire over moving legs of a man.)

Can = mouth and hook.  
Admire = fire, over heart over girl over 'descending through two'.  
Gold = king and gem.  
Disc = gold, plus erect over sun over running legs.  
Turn = carriage, plus carriage over tenth of cubit.  
Garden = to blend, plus pace in midst of court.  
High-above Pound takes to be clear enough.  
Jewel = king and dot. (A plain man + dot = dog.)  
Weeds = plants over cover over knife, e.g. growing things that must be destroyed.  
Fragrant = Pound could not reconcile Fenollosa's own notes with Morrison's Chinese Dictionary: he simply notes the sun under the growing tree at the right of the ideograph.

Some of Pound's components, and some of his deductions, are farfetched, especially those regarding 'admire' and 'flowers', but he nearly always manages to come close to the actual meaning. In a note on the plate he gives his English rendering of the poem - calling it "Paraphrase" with commendable caution:

"The moon's snow falls on the plum tree;  
Its boughs are full of bright stars.  
We can admire the bright turning disc;  
The garden high above there, casts its pearls  
to our weeds."

"You have not understood the poem until you have seen the tremendous antithesis from the first line to the last; from the first character, diagonal, to the last tremendous affirmative, sun under tree under enemies."

In 1937 Pound wrote to a friend: "When I did Cathay, I had no inkling of the technique of sound, which I am now convinced must exist or have existed in Chinese poetry." He was referring specifically to the fusion of word, sound and movement, a technique which the troubadours had used so strikingly; but if he had known something of the function of the phonetic in the structure of Chinese ideograph itself, he might very well have avoided many of the misinterpretations of individual characters in Fenollosa's notes and in the texts of the Chinese poems which he used in making Cathay. I have mentioned that his method of translating 'Flowers' in the second line of the poem dealt with above was at fault: the use of a Chinese dictionary shows that he had the right idea, but did not follow the right procedure:

花

This Pound glosses as "man + spoon, under plants abbreviation, probably actual representation of blossoms. Flowers at height of man's head." It will be agreed that 'flowers at height of man's head' is a plausible deduction from 'man plus spoon under plants', but that the latter is far from being a convincing definition of 'flower' at all. Pound obtained his result by separating the character into its three components; he was correct in noting that the top piece is an abbreviation for flowers (see (i) below), the left-hand piece an abbreviation for man (ii), and the rest the sign for spoon (iii).

艸 人 匕 化

(i) (ii) (iii) (iv)

But the dictionaries give 'plants' as radical, plus the phonetic group hua; the implication being that the whole is nothing more than a plant pronounced hua. Pound should have followed this procedure - the division of character into radical and remainder, and the separate resolution of the latter. The phonetic group hua represents a person wielding a ladle, and means 'to melt', hence to transform or change ( see (iv) above). Thus, a plant which changes with the seasons - a flower.

That Parting at Ch'ang-Kan"

When first o'er maiden brows my hair I tied,  
In sport I plucked the blooms before the door.  
You riding came on hobby-horse astride,  
And wreathed my bed with green-gage branches o'er.  
At Ch'ang-Kan Village long together dwelt  
We children twain, and knew no petty strife.  
At fourteen years, lo! I became thy wife.  
Yet ah! the modest shyness that I felt!  
My shamefaced head I in a corner hung;  
Nor to long calling answered word of mine.  
At fifteen years my heart's gate open sprung,  
And I was glad to mix my dust with thine.  
My troth to thee till death I keep for aye:  
My eyes still gaze adoring on my lord.  
Whe I was but sixteen you went away.  
In Ch'ü-t'ang Gorge how Yen-yü's billows roared!  
For five long months with you I cannot meet.  
The gibbon's wail re-echoes to the sky!  
Before the door, where stood your parting feet,  
The prints with verdant moss are covered high.  
Deep is that moss! it will not brush away.  
In early autumn's gales the leaflets fall.  
September now! - the butterflies so gay  
Disport on grasses by our garden wall.  
The sight my heart disturbs with longing woe.  
I sit and wail, my red cheeks growing old.  
Early and late I to the gorges go,  
Waiting for news that of thy coming told.  
How short will seem the way, if we but meet!  
Across the sand the wind flies straight to greet.

W.J.Fletcher: More Gems of Chinese Poetry.

"The River Merchant's Wife: A Letter"

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead  
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.  
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,  
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.  
And we went on living in the village of Chokan:  
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

At fourteen I married My Lord you.  
I never laughed, being bashful.  
Lowering my head, I looked at the wall.  
Called to, a thousand times, I never looked back.

At fifteen I stopped scowling,  
I desired my dust to be mingled with yours  
Forever and forever and forever.  
Why should I climb the look-out?

At sixteen you departed,  
You went into far Ku-to-Yen, by the river of swirling  
eddies,  
And you have been gone five months.  
The monkeys make sorrowful noise overhead.

You dragged your feet when you went out.  
By the gate now, the moss is grown, the different mosses,  
Too deep to clear them away!  
The leaves fall early this autumn, in wind.  
The paired butterflies are already yellow with August  
Over the grass in the West garden;  
They hurt me. I grow older.  
If you are coming down through the narrows of the  
river Kiang,  
Please let me know beforehand,  
And I will come out to meet you

As far as Cho-fu-Sa.

Ezra Pound: Cathay.

APPENDIX C

- I. "L'aura amara".....Arnaut Daniel.  
Translation.....Ezra Pound.
- II. Alaa, "Reis glorios".....Giraut de Bornelh.  
Two translations.....Ezra Pound.
- III. Planh, "Si tuit li dol".....Bertrans de Born.  
Translation.....Ezra Pound.
- IV. Sonetto.....Guido Cavalcanti.  
Two translations.....Ezra Pound.  
Another translation.....Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

L'aura amara  
Fals bruoills brancutz  
Clarzir  
Quel doutz espeissa ab fuoills,  
Els letz  
Becs  
Dels auzels ramencs  
Ten balps e mutz,  
Pars  
E non-pars;  
Per qu'eu m'esfortz  
De far e dir  
Plazers  
A mains per liei  
Que m'a virat bas d'aut,  
Don tem morir  
Sils afans no m'asoma.

Tant fo clara  
Ma prima lutz  
D'eslir  
Lies don crel cors los huoills,  
Non pretz  
Necs  
Mans dos aigonencs:  
D'autra s'esdutz  
Rars  
Mos preirars,  
Pero deportz  
M'es adauzir  
Volers,  
Bos motz ses grei  
De liei don tant m'azaut  
Qu'al sieu servir  
Sui del pe tro c'al coma.

Amors, gara,  
Sui ben vengutz  
C'auzir  
Tem far sim desacuoills  
Tals detz  
Pecs  
Que t'es miells quet trencs;  
Qu'ieu soi fis drutz  
Cars  
E non vars,  
Mal cors ferms fortz  
Mi fai cobrir  
Mains vers;  
Cab tot lo nei  
M'agr'ops us bais al chaut  
Cor refrezir  
Que noi val outra goma.

Si m'ampara  
Cill cuim trahutz  
D'aizir,  
Si qu'es de pretz capduoills,  
Dels quetz  
Precs  
C'ai dedinz a rencs,  
L'er fors rendutz  
Clars  
Mos pensars;  
Qu'eu fora mortz

Mas fam sofrir  
L'espers  
Queill prec quem brei,  
C'aisson ten let e baut;  
Que d'als jauzir  
Nom val jois una poma.

Doussa car', a  
Totz aips volgutz,  
Sofrir  
M'er per vos mains orguills,  
Car etz  
Decs  
De totz mos fadencs,  
Don ai mainz brutz  
Pars  
E gabars;  
Nim fai partir  
Avers,  
C'anc non amei  
Ren tan ab meins d'ufaut,  
Anz vos desir  
Plus que Dieus cill de Doma.

Erat para  
Chans e condutz,  
Formir  
Al rei qui t'er escuoills;  
Car pretz  
Secs  
Sai, lai es doblencs,  
E mantengutz  
Dars  
E manjars:  
De joi lat portz,  
Son anel mir,  
Sil ders,  
C'anc non estei  
Jorn d'Aragon quel saut  
Noi volgues ir,  
Mas sai m'an clamat Roma.

Faitz es l'acortz  
Qu'el cor remir  
Totz sers  
Lieis cui domnei  
Ses parsonier Arnaut;  
Qu'en autr'albir  
N'es fort m'ententa soma.

Arnaut Daniel. Bartsch's text.

The bitter air  
Strips panoply  
From trees  
Where softer winds set leaves,  
The glad  
Beaks  
Now in brakes are coy,  
Scarce peep the wee  
Mates \*.  
And unmates,  
    What gaud's the work?  
    What good the glees?

What curse  
I strive to shake!  
Me hath she cast from high,  
In fell disease  
I lie, and deathly fearing.  
So clear the flare  
That first lit me  
To seize  
Her who my soul believes;  
If cad  
Sneaks,  
Blabs, slanders, my joy  
Counts little fee  
Baits  
And their hates.  
    I scorn their perk  
    And preen, at ease.  
Disburse  
Can she, and wake  
Such firm delights, that I  
Am hers, froth, lees  
Bigod! from toe to earring.  
Amor, look yare!  
Know certainly  
The keys;  
How she thy suit receives;  
Nor add  
Piques,  
'Twere folly to annoy.  
I'm true, so dree  
Fates;  
No debates  
    Shake me, nor jerk.  
    My verities  
Turn terse,  
And yet I ache.  
Her lips, not snows that fly  
Have potencies  
To slake, to cool my searing.  
Behold my prayer  
(Or company  
Of these)  
Seeks whom such height achieves,  
Well clad  
Seeks  
Her, and would not cloy.  
Heart apertly  
States  
Thoughts. Hope waits  
    'Gainst death to irk:  
    False brevities  
And worse!  
To her I raik.                   (raik = hasten)  
Sole her; all others' dry  
Felicities  
I count not worth the leering.  
Ah, fair face, where  
Each quality  
But frees  
One pride-shaft more, that cleaves  
Me; mad frieks  
(O' they beck) destroy,  
And mockery  
Bates  
me, and rates.

Yet I not shirk  
Thy velleities,  
Averse me not  
Me not, nor slake  
Desire, God draws not nigh  
To Dome, with pleas  
Wherein's so little veering.

Now chant prepare,  
And melody  
To please the king, who'll judge thy sheaves,  
Worth, sad,  
Sneaks  
Here; double employ  
Hath there. Get thee  
Plates  
Full, and cates,  
Gifts, go! Not lurk  
Here till decrees  
Reverse,  
And ring thou take.  
Straight t'Arago I'd ply  
Cross the wide seas  
But 'Rome' disturbs my hearing.

At midnight mirk  
In secrecies  
I nurse  
My served make (make = mate)  
In heart; nor try  
My melodies  
At other's door not mearing.

Ezra Pound.

It is quite clear that in his translation Pound has sacrificed any pretence toward lucidity or style in the attempt to imitate Daniel's prodigious rhyming: 17 rhymes repeated six times in 42 ten-foot lines! Bartsch prints the text as strophes of seven lines; it is here given by rhyme rather than line for the sake of emphasis.

2

'Reis glorios, verais lums e clartatz,  
deus poderos, senher, si a vos platz,  
al meu companh sias fizels ajuda,  
qu'eu non lo vi pos la noitz fon venguda,  
et ades sera l'alba.

Bel companho, si dormetz o yelhatz,  
non dormatz plus, suau vos ressidatz,  
qu'en orient vei l'estela creguda  
qu'amenal jorn, qu'eu l'ai ben conoguda,  
et ades sera l'alba.

Bel companho, en chantan vos apel,  
non dormatz plus, qu'eu aug chanter l'auzel  
que vai queren lo jorn per lo boscatge,  
et ai paor quel gilos vos assatge,  
et ades sera l'alba.

Bel companho, eissetz al fenestral,  
et esgardatz les ensenhas del cel;  
conoisseretz sius sui fizels messatge:  
si non o faitz, vostres n'er lo dampnatge,  
et ades sera l'alba.

Bel companho, pos mi parti de vos,  
eu non dormi nim moc de ginholos,  
ans preguei due li filh sancta Maria,  
queus mi rendes per lejal companhia,  
et ades sera l'alba.

Bel companho, la foras als peiros  
me prejavatz qu'eu no fos dormilhos,  
enans velhes tota noit tro al dia;  
aras nous platz mos chans ni mi paria,  
et ades sera l'alba.

'Bel dous companh, tan sui en ric sojorn  
qu'eu no volgra mais fos alba no jorn,  
car la gensor que anc nasques de maire  
tenc et abras, per qu'eu non prezi gaire  
lo fol gilos ni l'alba.

Giraut de Bornelh. Bartsch's text.

Pound's first translation, in The Spirit of Romance:

King Glorious, true light and clarity,  
God powerful, Lord if it pleaseth thee  
To my companion be thou faithful aid,  
Him have I not seen since the night came on,  
And straightway comes the dawn.

Fair companion, sleepest or art awakened?  
Sleep no more, arise softly,  
For in the East I see that star increasing,  
That leadeth in the day; well have I known it  
And straightway comes the dawn.

Fair companion, a-singing I call you,  
Sleep no more, for I hear that bird a-singing  
Who goes crying the day through the wood.  
And I fear lest the 'jealous' should assail you,  
And straightway comes the dawn.

Fair companion, come out to the window,  
And look at the signs of the sky;  
Know if I am a faithful messenger,  
If you do not do this it'll be to your harm,  
And straightway comes the dawn.

'Bel companho,' since I left you  
I have not slept nor moved from my knees;  
But I have prayed to God, the son of St. Mary,  
That he give you back to me for loyal friendship,  
And straightway comes the dawn!

'Bel Companho,' out there by the stone porches,  
You warned me not to be sleepy.  
Since then I have watched all night through until the day.  
And now neither my song pleases you, nor does my company.  
And straightway comes the dawn!

(Then the lover from inside)

Fair, sweet companion, I am in such rich delight  
That I wish there would never come dawn nor day  
For the noblest that was ever born of mother  
I hold and embrace, so that I scarcely heed  
The jealous fool or the dawn.

The second version (Langue d'Oc, 1915):

"Compleynt of a gentleman who has been waiting  
outside for some time."

O plasmatour and true celestial light,  
Lord powerful, engirdled all with might,  
Give my good-fellow aid in fool's despite  
Who stirs not forth this night,  
And day comes on.

'Sst! my good fellow, art awake or sleeping?  
Sleep thou no more. I see the star upleaping  
That hath the dawn in keeping,  
And day comes on!

'Hi! Harry, hear me, for I sing aright  
Sleep not thou now. I hear the bird in flight  
That plaineth of the going of the night,  
And day comes on!

'Come now! Old swenkin! Rise up from the bed,  
I see the signs upon the wælkin spread,  
If thou come not, the cost be on thy head.  
And day comes on!

And here I am since going down of sun,  
And pray to God that is St. Mary's son,  
To bring thee **safe back**, my companion.  
And day comes on.

And thou out here beneath the porch of stone  
Badest me to see that a good watch was done,  
And now thou'lt none of me, and wilt have none  
Of song of mine.'

(Bass voice from inside)

'Wait, my good fellow. For such joy I take  
With her venust and noblest to my make  
To hold embraced, and will not her forsake  
For yammer of the cuckold,  
Though day break.'

3

Si tuit li dol elh plor elh marrimen  
E las dolors elh dan elh chaitivier  
Qu'om anc auzis en est segle dolen  
Fossen ensems, sembleran tuit leugier  
Contra la mort del jove rei engles,  
Don rema pretz e jovens doloros  
El mons obscurs e tenhz e tenebros,  
Sems de tot joi, ples de tristor e d'ira.

Dolen e trist e ple de marrimen  
Son remasut li cortes soldadier  
Elh trobador elh jonglar avinen:  
Trop en agut en Mort mortal guerrier  
Que tolt lor a lo jove rei engles,  
Ves cui eran li plus larc cobeitos.  
Ja non er mais ni no crezatz que fos  
Ves aquest dan el segle plors ni ira.

Estouta mortz, plena de marrimen,  
Vanar te potz quel melhor chavalier  
As tolt al mon qu'anc fos de nula gen,  
Quar non es res qu'a pretz aia mestier  
Que tot no fos el jove rei engles;

E fora melhz, s'a Deu plagues razos,  
Que visques el que maint altre enojos  
Qu'anc no feiron als pros mas dol e ira.

D'aquest segle flac, ple de marrimen,  
S'amors s'en vai, son joi tenc mensongier,  
Que re noi a que no torn en cosen;  
Totz jorns viuzis e val mens oi que ier.  
Chascus se mir el jove rei engles,  
Qu'era del mon lo plus valens dels pros:  
Ar es anatz sos gens corps amoros,  
Dont es dolors e desconortz e ira.

Calui que plac pel nostre marrimen  
Venir el mon nos traire d'encombrier  
E receup mor a nostre salvamen,  
Com a senhor umil e dreiturier,  
Clamem merce, qu'al jove rei engles  
Perdo, silh platz, si com es vers perdos,  
El fassa estar ab onratz companhos  
Lai ont anc dol non ac ni aura ira.

Bertrands de Born. Thomas' text.

If all the grief and woe and bitterness,  
All dolour, ill and every evil chance  
That ever came upon this grieving world  
Were set together they would seem but light  
Against the death of the young English King.  
Worth lieth riven and Youth dolorous,  
The world o'ershadowed, soiled and overcast,  
Void of all joy and full of ire and sadness.

Grieving and sad and full of bitterness  
Are left in teen the liegemen courteous,  
The joglars supple and the troubadours.  
O'ermuch hath ta'en Sir Death that deadly warrior  
In taking from them the young English King,  
Who made the freest hand seem covetous.  
'Las! Never was nor will be in this world  
The balance for this loss in ire and sadness!

O skilful Death and full of bitterness,  
Well may'st thou boast that thou the best chevalier  
That any folk e'er had, hast from us taken;  
Sith nothing is that unto worth pertaineth  
But had its life in the young English King  
And better were it, should God grant his pleasure,  
That he should live than many a living dastard  
That doth but wound the good with ire and sadness.

From this faint world, how full of bitterness  
Love takes his way and holds his joy deceitful,  
Sith no thing is but turneth unto anguish  
And each today 'vails less than yestere'en,  
Let each man visage this young English King  
That was most valiant 'mid all worthiest men!  
Gone is his body fine and amorous,  
Whence have we grief, discord and deepest sadness.

Him, whom it pleased for our great bitterness  
To come to earth to draw us from misventure,  
Who drank of death for our salvacioun,  
Him do we pray as to a Lord most righteous  
And humble eke, that the young English King  
He please to pardon, as true pardon is,  
And bid to go in with honoured companions  
There where there is no grief, nor shall be sadness.

Ezra Pound.

Chi è questa che vien, ch'ogni uom la mira,  
Che fa dí clarità l'aer tremare,  
E mena secco Amor, sí che parlare  
Null'uom ne puote, ma ciascun sospira?

Ahi, Dio, che sembra quando gli occhi gira?  
Dicalo Amor, ch'io nol saprei contare:  
Cotanto d'umiltá donna mi pare,  
Che ciascun' altra in vèr di lei chiam'ira.

Non si potria contar la sua piacenza,  
Ch'a lei s'inchina ogni gentil virtute,  
E la beltate per sua Dea la mostra.

Non fu sí alta già la mente nostra,  
E non si è posta in noi tanta salute,  
Che propriamente n'abbiam conoscenza.

Guido Cavalcanti.

Who is she coming, whom all gaze upon,  
Who makes the air all tremulous with light,  
And at whose side is Love himself? that none  
Dare speak, but each man's sighs are infinite.  
Ah me! how she looks round from left to right,  
Let Love discourse; I may not speak threon.  
Lady she seems of such high benison  
As makes all others graceless in men's sight.  
The honour which is hers cannot be said;  
To whom are subject all things virtuous,  
While all things beauteous own her deity.  
Ne'er was the mind of man so nobly led  
Nor yet was such redemption granted us  
That we should ever know her perfectly.

D.G.Rossetti.

Who is she coming, drawing all men's gaze,  
Who makes the air one trembling clarity  
Till none can speak but each sighs piteously  
Where she leads Love adown her trodden ways?  
Ah God! The thing she's like when her glance strays,  
Let Amor tell. 'Tis no fit speech for me.  
Mistress she seems of such great modesty  
That every other woman were called 'Wrath.'  
No-one could ever tell the charm she hath  
For all the noble powers bend toward her  
She being beauty's godhead manifest.  
Our daring ne'er before held such high quest;  
But ye! There is not in you so much grace  
That we can understand her rightfully.

Ezra Pound.

Who is she that comes, makyng turn every man's eye  
And makyng the air to tremble with a bright clearenesse  
That leadeth with her Love, in such nearness  
That no man may proffer of speech more than a sigh?  
Ah God, what she is like when her own eye turneth, is  
Fit for Amor to speake, for I can not at all;  
Such is her modesty, I would call  
Every woman else but an useless uneasiness.  
No one could ever tell all of her pleasauntnesse  
In that every high noble vertu leaneth to herward,  
So Beauty sheweth her forth as her Godhede;

Never before was our mind so high led,  
Nor have we so much of heal as will afford  
That our thought may take her immediate in its embrace.

Ezra Pound.

APPENDIX D

"THE COLLEGE OF ARTS"

The following document was enclosed  
in a letter from Pound to Harriet  
Monroe on November 9th., 1914.

It has been noted by certain authors that London is the capital of the world, and 'Art is a matter of capitals'. At present many American students who would have sought Vienna or Prague or some continental city are disturbed by war. To these the College of Arts offers a temporary refuge and a permanent centre.

We draw the attention of new students to the fact that no course of study is complete without one or more years in London. Scholarly research is often but wasted time if it has not been first arranged and orientated in the British Museum.

The London collections are if not unrivalled at least unsurpassed. The Louvre has the Venus and the Victory but the general collection of sculpture in the Museum here is, as a whole, the finer collection. The National Gallery is smaller than the Louvre but it contains no rubbish.

Without chauvinism we can very easily claim that study in London is at least as advantageous as study elsewhere, and that a year's study in London by no means prevents earlier or later study in other capitals.

The American student coming abroad is usually presented with two systems of study, firstly, that of 'institutions' for the most part academic, sterile, professorial; secondly, instruction by private teachers often most excellent, often the reverse.

The College of Arts offers contact with artists of established position, creative minds, men for the most part who have suffered in the cause of their art.

Recognising the interaction of the arts, the inter-stimulus, and interenlightenment, we have gathered the arts together, we recommend that each student shall undertake some second or auxiliary subject, though this is in all cases left to his own inclination. We recognise that certain genius runs deep and often in one groove only, and that some minds move in the language of one medium only. But this does not hold true for the general student. For him and for many of the masters one art is the constant illuminator of another, a constant refreshment.

The College prepares two sorts of instruction; one for those who intend a career in some single art, who desire practical and technical instruction, a second for those who believe that learning is an adornment, a gracious and useless pleasure, that is to say for serious art students and for the better sort of dilettanti.

The cost of instruction will vary from £20 to £100, depending on how much the student wishes to do himself and how much he wishes to have done for him. We recognise that the great majority of students now coming to Europe are musical students, the next most numerous class are painters and sculptors; we nevertheless believe that there are various other studies which would be pursued if students knew where to go for instruction.

We try not to duplicate courses given in formal institutions like the University of London, or purely utilitarian courses like those of Berlitz. London is itself a larger University, and the best specialists are perhaps only approachable in chance conversation. We aim at an intellectual status no lower than that attained by the courts of the Italian Renaissance.

Our organisation is not unlike that of a University graduate school, and is intended to supplement the

graduate instruction in 'arts'. This instruction is offered to anyone who wants it, not merely to those holding philological degrees.

A knowledge of morphology is not essential to the appreciation of literature, even the literature of a forgotten age or decade.

W. Arnold Dolmetsch's position in the world of music is unique, and all music-lovers are so well aware of it, that one need not here pause to proclaim it. Painting and sculpture are taught by the most advanced and brilliant men of our decade, but if any student desires instruction in the earlier forms of the art, instruction in representative painting awaits him. The faculty as arranged to date, though it is still but a partial faculty, is perhaps our best prospectus.

As a supplement to the various courses in arts and crafts, we point out the value of individual research in, and study of, the various collections of the South Kensington and British Museums. We will endeavour to save the student's time by giving general direction for such work, and initiation in method, apart from the usual assistance offered by the regular Museum officials.

In certain rare cases, the American college student, desiring more than his degree, will find it possible to spend his Junior or Sophomore year in London and return to his own University for graduation. Those desiring to do this should of course submit to us their plans of study, together with a clear statement of their requirements for graduation at the home college. Such students will have to possess rather more than average intelligence.

If intending to take graduate work for higher degrees, they may, however, find that this form of recess will give them a distinct advantage over their colleagues, such as fully to compensate for the inconvenience and derangement of undergraduate studies. It is always open to them to fill in routine courses by application to the University of London (that is to say, ordinary mathematics or classics), pursuing said courses in conjunction with their special work with the College of Arts.

(End of Prospectus).

Pound's remarks: "The college should come as a boon to various and numerous students who would otherwise be fugging about in continental pensions, meeting one single teacher who probably wishes them in the inferno, and dependent for the rest on fellow-boarders and public amusements. Secondly, it would seem designed to form itself into a centre of intelligent and intellectual activity, rather than a cramming factory where certain data are pushed into the student regardless of his abilities or predilections....."

Among the members of the faculty were the following: Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Wyndham Lewis, Edward Wadsworth, Edmund Dulac, Reginald Wilenski, Arnold Dolmetsch, Felix Salmond, K.R. Heyman, Ezra Pound, John Cournos, and Alvin Langdon Coburn.

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